Win Your Inner Battle

Powerful stories to transform your relationship with life

Deepak Jindal (DJ)

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To my father, who is watching his son from above and is friendlier with God now.

To my mother, who took me to school, holding my hands.

To my wife, who has always shown her love and support.

To Saksham and Sia, my lifelines!

If there is an amateur reader still left in the world – or anybody who just reads and runs – I ask him or her, with great affection and gratitude, to split the dedication of this book four ways with my wife and children.

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Epilogue

Do you have a Dream?

I was a ten-year-old child, waking up at 4 a.m. to take bath and then rush to the temple every day. My only intention (and perhaps greed) as a child was to ask Lord Rama,"Please bring a VCR (video cassette recorder) into my house. I don't need anything else in life." The very thought of owning a VCR lit up my eyes like the sun's face lighting up each morning. The energy and motivation to get up early and be ready to pray in the temple came from the complete faith that one day it shall happen.

When I look back, it seems funny. It also makes me realize that inspiration doesn't require BIG dreams. You just need faith. At the right moment, faith can push you to your maximum limit. Finally, I got a VCR after eight years. Finally, I could watch Amitabh Bachchan's movies at home!

(I am a great fan of Amitabh Bachchan and crazy about his movies. He was and is still my real hero who fought evil, cared for his family and was always engaged in action and romance.)

"I have a dream. That one day, all of god's children will be able to join hands and sing… free at last! Free at last! Thank god almighty, we are free at last," said Martin Luther King Jr, on August 28,1963 at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington DC.

Dreams keep us alive always. Aliveness calls for being in action at a particular moment. Teenagers are always excited to go to school or college in funky clothes, hairdo and makeup. Their small expectation or even aspiration is for their best friend to say,"You are looking gorgeous/handsome today." This one thought runs in their minds constantly and keeps them active right from morning till they reach college and meet their buddies. Doesn't this happen? There is always a sense of completeness and accomplishment whenever we achieve our expectations or dreams. The dream of looking our best, becoming an entrepreneur, a doctor or an engineer or having our own car or house keeps us motivated to get out of the house and work hard.

I was born and brought up in a small town in Moga, Punjab (India). I spent my initial childhood years in a mud house. My father was a clerk in a local oil

factory and he went to work on a bicycle every day. Sometimes his *kurta* became oily. Every evening after returning from work, my mother washed it well so that he could wear it again the next day. My mother was a school teacher in a private school. I remember her day was always full of action, from the time she woke up till she went to bed. Her responsibility in the morning was to make breakfast for everyone (we lived in a joint family of ten members), get us ready for school and reach her school by 7.30 a.m.

She hardly had ninety minutes to do all this. For thirty years, she was punctual to school every day. There wasn't a single day that she went late to her school. As soon as she came back from school, the children were ready for tuitions, which continued till evening. She rested for barely half an hour. Then she had a cup of tea and started her work again, preparing dinner for everyone and ironing clothes. She had a peaceful sleep after a tiring day.

Life was indeed tough.

'Money is evil' is what I was told by my family.

I remember asking my parents for ten paise to buy a toffee and it was an achievement for me if I got the money from them.

Money spoils children and people always misuse it; so never ask for more in life and be satisfied with whatever god has given you. This is what I was constantly told. This advice was strongly imprinted in my subconscious mind. I was reminded of it whenever I thought of money.

The brain operates in a definite pattern. It saves incidents and pictures in its memory and stacks them as 'good' or 'bad.' So if a similar incident happens in the future, the brain picks it up, stacks it and acts accordingly.

For a child, his world is his home. Whatever he sees and observes during his childhood in his home and environment (town, friends circle and culture)shapes his beliefs. Eating habits, good and bad manners, religion, clothes and TV programs are factors that build his mind into a strong entity. When he goes out and sees a different world, questions boggle his mind as to what is right and wrong and what is good and bad.

I belong to the Hindu religion though I respect all religions. My father was a strong believer and devotee of Lord Rama. I once asked him, "Why only Rama and not the other gods?" His answer was, "Son, he is an honest king and a role model of a son,father,brother and husband. All men should respect his values. He has lived his life serving people. You should respect elders like Rama."

For me, Shiva was the strongest god a she was the creator of Lord Rama. I used to argue with my school friends about who the strongest god in the world was. At that time, I had no idea about other religions such as Islam and Christianity.

One's belief and value system is built right from childhood. We have been taught right from childhood that eating non-vegetarian food is not right and girls wearing jeans is not a cultured practice. The principal in our school had strict rules that boys should oil their hair and comb it well and girls must always tie their hair in a ponytail. Or else the parents were called to school and they had to pay a fine. These experiences during my childhood days shaped my belief system.

Ask these questions to yourself:

1. What were my beliefs as a child?

2. How is culture affecting my present?

3. Are what you believe the facts?

Neighbors play a significant impact in our lives. They are like family members. Their culture, economic conditions and language are similar to ours. We do not have a choice in our neighbors. Even if we change our neighborhood, it is just a change in location and not people's behavior. The time spent with neighbors leaves a great mark in our memory.

Education is another important factor that determines a person's growth. There are two kinds of education: one is information-based learning from a school or college and the other is transformational education based on our experiences in life, our perception of things and the manner in which we make decisions based on our experiences. The second kind of education is not limited to books.

These days,extra-curricular activities are given a lot of importance. Students have to excel in different areas such as music, sports and entrepreneurship. Every day, they spend a few hours on the internet to get knowledge. Thanks to the internet, anyone can reach out to any person in any part of the world. Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter have changed the world and people's perceptions. Businesses are driven through social media. There are several opportunities for everyone to grow. One just needs an idea to implement and the patience to stick to it.

When people travel, the first thing they do is post their pictures on Facebook and then they expect maximum 'likes' from others. Everyone seeks acceptance and love through different channels. If you praise someone, he or she will be your friend forever. The moment you point out his bad habits, he will not be the same person for you. Though he is the same person, your perception of him will change and vice-versa.

Have you ever observed this? When we ask our friends how they are, the usual answer is, "I am good." But the entire day they would have cribbed about their lives and the things that were not going as well as they had expected. So you see two different faces of the same person. He himself doesn't realize that the truth is missing somewhere.

Michael works as an IT executive in a big firm in Bangalore. He has a good body, a smart personality and a smiling face that sports Gucci sunglasses. He is punctual to work in the morning. But he always leaves office early without informing anyone.

His manager notices this a couple of times and questions Michael. Michael replies, "I finish my work on time, so I don't like to stay in office without any reason."

Sakshi works in the same department as Michael and she begins to like him. One day, they both get a chance to have lunch together. Sakshi asks Michael, "Why do you leave early?" This question makes him think twice. "Why I am creating such an impression in office? Is it that I don't care about anybody? Is it that I don't like someone questioning me?" The more he thinks about this, the more significance he gives to these thoughts. One final day, the answer

pops in his head that he was not accepting the fact that he was not professional in his approach. Once he realizes this truth, he enters his boss's cabin and tells his boss, "Sir, I am really sorry for not being disciplined." The boss is quite happy and praises him for accepting the truth.

From that day, Sakshi and Michael leave office together. Michael drops her home every day.

People perceive money as an evil. But I think money does buy happiness. Have you ever seen a person sitting on his private yacht looking sad and cribbing about life's problems? In my childhood, I have seen arguments between my mother and father on issues of money. Going out of the city on a vacation was a dream come true and a rarity. But my father often said, "Enjoy the present as the present." People have issues related to money and have two choices: either keep looking at money as a problem or accept that it is a problem and find out solution.

Thinking never happens in the form of words or sentences. It is always created in the form of pictures and images in your mind. There is always a conversation happening between you and your brain. The brain is like a machine that keeps running nonstop till you are alive. You cannot stop this machine. The only thing that you can do is keep a watch on your conversations with the brain and see how your emotions are formed based on these conversations and thoughts.

Have you ever asked yourself this: why am I thinking negative?

No. We just keep going with the flow and start enjoying the conversation and start believing it as a fact.

Now stop immediately and ask yourself this: is it a fact?

I was never good at studies, though I studied engineering and did a management course. I woke up late in the hostel and missed classes. I always felt as though I could not do anything big in life. Today, I am writing a book and you are reading it. Isn't it amazing? It is just a change in one's thought process. You need to start believing that anything is possible. Now, I want you

to **write down five key challenges you face and why you see them as challenges. Then write this: is it really true and real?**

Please don't read further until you finish this exercise.

I was a thirteen-year-old in class four. It was summer. And it was the science period. I kept looking out of the window. Suddenly the science teacher screamed at me, "Deepak,stand up!" The teacher came near me and slapped me hard on my face. Everyone in class started laughing. I was shocked. I couldn't even understand what had happened that moment.

That day I made a decision that I would not do anything in future that would make me a laughing stock. That decision, taken in my subconscious mind, carried me through the next twenty years. I hardly asked any questions in class and I was always quiet even among friends. Some friends took my silence to mean an attitude problem. I didn't realize why I was behaving that way. Finally, in one of the life skills training programs I attended, I could clearly see my past. That particular incident in the past was driving me in my present. I always complained about teachers and felt they were never the well-wishers of students.

It was my strong belief that teachers never thought good of students until that training session. That very day, I called my teacher, "Sir, do you remember me? I am Deepak and you slapped me without any reason in fourth class." He was shocked to hear from me and more shocked to listen to my complaint. He replied, "Deepak, I don't remember this and I cannot believe that my slap has had such an impact on your life. I am sorry." This is what I wished to hear from him. It seemed as though a big burden was lifted from my body. I felt such deep relaxation.

We all live in the past and carry forward our past experiences. And then we behave as though we are doing the right thing. I am sure you too are carrying some of your past experiences. Just think about how it is impacting your present life.

Physical appearance plays an important role in building our belief system. You can easily identify even a stranger on the road based on his dressing style. You can tell whether he or she is a lawyer, doctor, priest or a policeman. In

your office, if a pretty girl in blue jeans and a white shirt, sporting a smile on her face and wearing fragrant perfume asks you for the way to the cafeteria, you will forget all your work and take her to the cafeteria. The way an individual dresses and carries himself or herself leaves a lot of room for judgment by others. There is a saying that goes like this: First impression is the best impression.

The way we dress also reflects our confidence. When you think of Barack Obama (President of the United States), the picture that appears in your mind is that of a man in black suit, always smiling with confidence. Now, can you imagine him wearing a *kurta pajama* and coming out of his private jet? The clothes that people wear are always integrated with their culture and positions.

Every new year, new resolutions are declared. "I will lose ten kilos," "I will earn forty per cent more income" and so on. After a few weeks, these resolutions get lost in our busy schedules and priorities. The only reason for this is the fear of failure to achieve our goals; we start losing confidence with time. The longer it takes to attain our goals, the more frustrated we get.

I remember once I took a resolution that I would be financially free by the age of thirty-seven and started declaring this to everyone I met in office and my neighbors. However, I didn't make any plan or strategy to achieve this goal. In my daily routine, I woke up late, went to office, attended meetings and ended my evenings watching TV. So my actions were not aligned with my goals.

One successful person in office had written this in front of his desk: I do the difficult work first. When I asked him how this small sentence had changed his life, he said that one day he realized that he was always trying to avoid the difficult tasks in his life and that did not allow him to grow exponentially. This thought changed his mind-set. Now,he always tries to finish the difficult tasks first and convert them into opportunities in life.

Someone asked me how I managed to do many things in life. I replied, "I never repeat the same work."

But in the process of doing many things in life, if you work long hours, you get stressed out and this has an impact on your lifestyle as well as your health.

Such people get tired easily and are exhausted in life. They never enjoy life.

According to scientists, every thought we have during stress has an impact on the relevant parts of our bodies. You must read book the *You Can Heal Your Life* by Louis I Hay. She has very rightly and practically explained the different kinds of health issues that can be cured by positive thoughts.

It is also believed that the stress felt during the night is more powerful than the stress felt during the day because stress at night gets stored in our subconscious mind.

I know many people who have really forgotten themselves in the bid to earn money. They became rich from rags. Their only focus is to earn money, more money and then some more money. Of course, they make a lot of money and also earn health issues and stress.

Exercise

– Write down three desirable goals and why they should be accomplished.

– Why are the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer? Give this a thought and write down your views.

Another analogy you need to understand here is that unsuccessful people are always supported by reasons. We call them 'survivors' and these reasons look like facts to them. However,successful people are always supported by their actions. Such people are 'performers' as their actions speak louder than their words and they produce results in life.

Now,ninety-seven per cent of people fall in the category of survivors and only three per cent people fall in the category of performers. You need to decide what is driving you: reason or action.

For example, at the airport, while boarding a flight on the economy class, passengers are always in a long queue. They get fixed seats and they have to go through the journey with folded arms due to space constraints. On the other hand, business class travelers are given priority; they get more luxury and space to enjoy the journey. Business class travellers form only three per cent and the economy class travelers account for the majority (ninety-seven per cent).

At some point of time in life, people take a decision to not follow the crowd anymore and start believing in their dreams and focus on the purpose of life. The purpose of life is always bigger than themselves. Soon people start following you and you start leading others with vision.

When we have doubts in our ability, we stop growing. Saying 'no' to an opportunity is more painful than getting your wisdom tooth removed by a dentist.

We always find time to talk about other people around us and this gives us pleasure. However,the fact remains that talking (or shall we call it 'gossip'?) will not lead to any developments in our life or changes in our lifestyle. We have been doing this right from our childhood and we will continue to do so, as gossiping has become our staple food. We always have a choice to gossip or not. Every choice we make has consequences. We alone are responsible for these consequences and not our circumstances.

Fear is false evidence appearing real. I would say fear is just a negative thought. This fear is injected so deep into us that it is becomes a part of our body and gets settled in the subconscious mind.

A new-born baby doesn't know what is right or wrong. As he grows to an infant, he starts talking and observing his parents. Parents, beware of him. He starts developing ideas about what is right and what is wrong from what he sees and hears. The more he sees things repeated in life, his belief system also gets seated in his mind.

I was in class nine. A couple of my friends smoked. One day, my mother noticed me standing with them. She warned me not to play with them anymore as they were 'bad' boys. No one told me that smoking cigarettes makes the lungs weak and causes cancer. I started labelling people who smoked as 'bad' people. This is how we associate people in our lives, through our belief system.

Write down the names of people in your life whom you have stopped talking to due to their bad habits and what you think about them.

Now, belief is nothing but the thoughts of any individual, which are treated as facts. We pray to god believing we will get solutions. But we do not get solutions till we put in efforts. Look around and observe the belief system of those who are close to us: our parents, friends, teachers and relatives. We start believing in their belief systems and act like them. The advantage of this is we get accepted by them and we don't look odd among them.

How many times do we say, "I am pressurized by others to do that work?" Husbands get pressurized by their wives, executives by their bosses, children by their parents, students by teachers and so on. According to the Oxford dictionary, pressure is "the exertion of continuous force on or against a body by another, in contact with it." Pressure is measured in Newton/square meter and is always in the form of solid,liquid or gas. Now relate this definition in your life. Pressure actually doesn't exist in reality. It is just a situation in which someone said something to you and then you derived a meaning from that to act upon. Right?

Exercise

– Write down the situations you are pressurized in and how you feel about them.

Are you Passionate?

Do people really have a passion or is it just a fashion? Are they really passionate about their lives to achieve something or are they just presenting themselves in society with fashionable stuff to gain acceptance? Fashion trends and the way we dress have an influence on our thinking process. I am sure you will agree with this.

Anjali, a 22 year-old engineer, passed out of college and joined an IT firm as executive engineer. She told me, "Sir, I spend one hour in the morning to get ready for office and then forty minutes during bathroom breaks so that I always look beautiful and fresh. I always carry my makeup kit around and I cannot afford to forget it."

Looking good is important. It drives an individual's actions and shopping trends. It always carries weight. The most important thought any person has is whether he or she is looking good. Now, looking good is related to people accepting you and complimenting you for your clothes and jewelry.

Today is your first day in college and the moment you enter the class guys come to you and say, "Hi! You look amazing in this dress." Your whole day is filled with happiness. Getting praise and compliments is a necessity and we are ready to spend more money to look good. Isn't this true?

Fashion and designs change every day. Shopping trends have changed a lot in the last ten to fifteen years. E-commerce sites such as Flipkart, Jabong and Myntra have given more options to youngsters to buy more clothes at lower prices. This had led to high spending habits among them. You can see the influence of TV serials and movies on people's fashion sense. Girls love window shopping to get a look and feel of clothes and, of course, they love a good bargain.

A recent survey said that e-commerce shopping sites were preferred more than local brick-and-mortar shops. They give more options and discounts to the youth. Also, e-commerce saves time and fuel money and one can shop 24X7. You don't have to wait for the shop to open.

The first thing most people do when they open their laptop or tablet is open shopping sites and look for deals. Whether there is a need for the product or not, people still buy things because of the deals on offer. Another factor is some e-commerce sites give you money for referring them to your friends. It is always a good option to earn money and spend it on clothes again.

The first impression of doctors, lawyers and priests is based on their physical appearance. There is a saying, "Wear what others like and eat what you like."People spend hours in front of the mirror, smiling at their own faces. This gives them the confidence and opportunity to work on any area that needs work.

Always love yourself and your body. Even when you grow older, keep loving yourself. There is a connection between loving yourself and others loving you. When you love yourself, you are also loved by others.

When we talk about fashion trends, it is always about what the majority follows. There are instances when we are forced to wear a certain type of outfit for certain situations. The same principle is applied in our lives when we follow the crowd. We do not want to be the 'odd man out.' That is why we end up not following own dreams.

Write down three things that you followed even if you didn't want to. What was the impact on you?

We are always worried about people's reaction to our clothes. This creates self-doubt and, of course, affects the performance of our work. Henry Ford was working as a laborer in a machine shop. He owned millions of dollars. But he didn't get to spend all this money on himself. He had little schooling, but he started a business with no major capital.

I remember a poem in this context.

If you think you are beaten, you are;

If you think you dare not, you don't;

If you like to win, but you think you cannot,

It is almost certain you won't.

If you think you'll lose, you've lost.

For out of the world we find,

Success begins with a fellow's will.

It's all in the state of mind.

If you think you are outclassed, you are.

You have got to think high to rise.

You have got to be sure of yourself before

You can ever win a prize.

Life's battles don't always go

To the stronger or faster man;

But soon or later, the man who wins

Is the man who thinks he can.

Let's commit ourselves to this poem and read it whenever in doubt.

Being obsessed with our body and beauty and following the crowd has very little value in comparison to following our passion. Introspection of the self and listening to the inner voice (thoughts) outlines the path to moving forward in life. Now, this internal voice will always give you two choices: follow or not follow. You have to make your choice. Remember this: being fashionable is not bad;the only factor that needs to be considered is the alignment of your fashion statement with your passion.

There are always instances that affect our life and our decision-making. These instances are nothing but the amount of impact someone's statement has on our minds in a particular situation. A lot of people struggle from stress, long work hours and the need to get a good job or be in a relationship. People are increasingly orienting themselves towards yoga, meditation, motivational sessions and personality development courses to get a break.

The next few chapters will definitely give you food for thought. I am sure one or many stories can be related to your life. These stories will give you a different point of view to act with full passion so that you can live your life more powerfully, with full freedom of expression. They will give you a purpose

in life to move ahead and achieve your dreams. Make sure you relate the stories to you and your life. Don't read them as mere stories.

I have penned a few quotes based on my life experiences and these quotes have been represented in the form of short stories. I am sure you will relate to them.

Have you ever experienced your first kiss? It gives so much pleasure and you lose yourself in it. At that particular moment, there is no life, no death, no gain and no pain. It takes you to a level of transformation and you forget all worries. In order to kiss someone, the other person has to be close to you. That is when two people feel each other and feel like kissing each other.

When you kiss life, life feels closer to you. Life takes a turn and blessings come pouring from heaven. There are always hurdles between lovers before they reach the stage of kissing. In life too, one experiences many problems and issues, which have to be resolved first before one experiences happiness. The motivational quotes in the following chapters along with short stories show you the way to think differently. They also teach you how to express a different point of view in a positive manner and how to treat life and get close to it. Close your eyes, hug life tight and just kiss it.

1
Begin to End – DJ

Tuhina sat in the dark reading *Chicken Soup for the Soul* using a flashlight. She was fifteen years old and loved to read. Reading helped her escape from reality and transported her to various places at once. *Harry Potter* took her to the magical land of the Hog warts while reflections of *India after Gandhi* left her in a rather patriotic mood. She could never have enough of books.

Another reason why Tuhina took refuge in books was because she was an introvert. She did not have many friends and was not very popular among her peers. She would rather spend time in her imaginary world than live in the real world. She found the real world too harsh.

Tuhina never fit in with girls of her age. Girls always made fun of her because she wore her hair in pigtails and had thick unfashionable shell-framed peach glasses. Her clothes were mostly hand-me-downs from her older sister and hence were not very 'in' or 'happening.' Her classmates would often call her a 'nerd,' 'geek' or 'bookworm.'

Girls her age were always talking about boys. They only seemed interested in going to the beauty parlor and shopping. When girls in her class talked, it was incomprehensible and sounded like gibberish to her.

"You know Meghana told me that Shiva said that Priti was really good-looking." The girls would gush, "Really?" Then Priti would flip her hair and say, "I don't think Shiva is bold enough and he is not my type." "Ritu, where do you get your hair cut?" "OMG! That is such a cute skirt." "When I received his message…"

As these conversations continued around Tuhina, all she could think of was when she would return home to her books. She had already decided to become a writer. Tuhina was certain that she would make a great author as she had a vivid imagination. Hence, when it came to choosing subjects in the eleventh standard, she obviously picked literature and advanced English.

Tuhina was a star student. She completed not only the assigned reading but also the suggested ones. Her essays were fantastic. Her class teacher often

patted her on the back and said, "If only I had more students like Tuhina…"

There was a debate competition once in school. The topic was 'Is India a great country?' The teacher took Tuhina aside and told her, "Everyone will send their best student and you clearly are the best writer I have in class. You are very talented with your words and you are well-read. I think you are the best candidate for this competition." Tuhina looked scared and said, "But madam, this is a debate competition. I do not like speaking in public." The teacher looked rattled and said, "Rubbish, my child. This is a great opportunity to showcase your talent."

Tuhina tried to dissuade her teacher and said, "Madam, I want to be a writer. I have chosen this path because I want to use the written word to explore various topics. I would be happy to participate in an essay competition, but not a debate."

The teacher looked angrily at Tuhina and said, "Look child, what is a writer without a voice."She explained, "A good author draws from personal experience. If you continue this way, then you will not lead a full life. Whether you succeed or fail,this will be an experience. Do not fear new experiences, my child. Experiences will add depth to your writing and give you material and inspiration."

Tuhina was trying to process the information given to her by the teacher. The teacher added, "There is nothing to fear but fear itself." She handed Tuhina the competition flyer and pointed to the bottom. It said three winners would be given a fully-funded scholarship to a summer institute in Oxford, London for any course of their choice. The teacher whispered, "One of the courses in the summer institute is for budding authors. The mentors there are some of your favorite writers."

The teacher gave Tuhina a smile and told her to prepare well. As she walked away, Tuhina clutched the flyer in fear and excitement. As badly as she wanted to attend the summer institute in London, the thought of public speaking was frightening. The thought of people watching her made her insides churn.

She decided to talk to her mother about this. That evening, Tuhina went to her mother and told her about the debate. Her mother asked her gently, "Do

you still want to be an author?" Tuhina said, "Without a doubt."

Her mother smiled, "You have begun a tough journey. Being an author is not an easy task. This is the first of the many obstacles that will come in your way. If you give in to fear and frustration right now, you will never achieve your goal."

She continued, "It is important to finish what we start."

She then suggested, "Tuhina, why don't you start by writing the essay for the debate. Then practice it regularly: first in front of the mirror, then in front of me, then in front of other family members, followed by your teachers and classmates.

"I have no doubt that you will write a brilliant speech. The only obstacle here is your fear of speaking in front of people. This can be overcome step by step. If you look at it as an insurmountable task, you will be paralyzed. Instead, you should take it one day at a time, slowly and steadily, all the while focusing on your ultimate goal of becoming an author. That summer institute in London is a great opportunity for your career."

Tuhina was moved by her mother's vote of confidence and the direction from her teacher. She registered for the debate the next day. She decided that she would not give up. She vowed to pursue her goal till the end and tackle each obstacle as it came. Her speech was going to be based on the famous words of Gandhi, "Be the change you want to see."

I relate this story to my life thus:

2
Actions can Make Even an Inch of a Difference – DJ

There are so many aspirants for the civil services exams. What sets them apart from the others is the ability to maintain discipline and work hard in the long run. It is sincerity that binds them. The work they do everyday matters. The exam is not hard, what is hard is the struggle behind the exam.

Saksham was inspired by these words that he read in a book on the civil services exam. He wanted to be an officer in the Indian Administrative Services (IAS). But he was scared that he was not intelligent enough. He had not been a top student in school or college. He had always been an average student.

He decided to ask his brother who had also attempted the civil services exam but could not clear it. Saksham told his brother, "Brother, I was thinking of giving the civil services exam."

His brother who was busy with some office work said without looking up, "Saksham, I do not have time for these jokes."

Saksham said, "But I am serious."

His brother looked at him and said, "Do not waste your time. You are not smart enough. I have always been smarter than you and I could not clear it."

Saksham started to argue, "But…"

His brother put up his hand and waved it, signaling to him to go away.

Saksham went to his room. He looked at the syllabus. It definitely looked difficult. He would have to do a lot of work to improve his mathematics skills.

That day at lunch, he thought he would discuss it with his mother. His mother served him some vegetables and rice and said, "Here Saksham, eat while it's hot."

Saksham held his mother's hand and asked her, "Mom, do you think I am not smart?"

His mother looked at him strangely and said, "What has your brother been telling you now?"

Saksham said, "No, no. It is not that. I was just asking him if I should give the civil services exam."

His mother looked surprised, "Are you serious? You also want to give that dastardly exam? Did you not see your brother struggle for so many years? He was very disappointed. Why do you want to put yourself through that?"

Saksham looked sad and asked, "So you too think I am not smart enough?"

His mother lovingly said, "No. That is not what I am saying. I will support you as I supported your brother. I just do not like seeing my children getting disappointed."

Saksham ate his food quietly. He was not happy at his family being un supportive.

After lunch he went to the park. He read those inspirational words again.

There are so many aspirants for the civil services exams. What sets them apart from the others is the ability to maintain discipline and work hard in the long run. It is sincerity that binds them. The work they do everyday matters. The exam is not hard, what is hard is the struggle behind the exam.

A jogger stopped next to him seeing the book in Saksham's hand. She asked him, "Are you preparing for the exam too? I have been going for coaching classes for the last year. Where do you go for coaching?"

Saksham looked at her and said, "I am thinking of giving it a shot. Do I need coaching?"

The jogger scoffed at him and said, "Oh so you are one of those who just keep thinking. Well, if you keep thinking you will never make it through the preliminary exam even, forget the main exam and the interview. You need determination and confidence, which you clearly lack."

With these words, the jogger continued her run.

Saksham's face turned bright red. He was embarrassed. He headed home and hunted for information on all the coaching institutes. He called them one after the other. They were too expensive for him. He did not know how he could afford so much money.

That night after dinner, when his father was reading a book, Saksham went up to him and said, "Dad, I want to give the civil service exam."

His dad looked at him and said, "Are you sure?"

Saksham hesitated a little and said, "Yes."

His father put down his book and said, "Son, you are clearly unsure of yourself. This is a difficult path."

Saksham looked determined and said, "I am sure."

His father asked, "Do you want coaching?"

Saksham said, "I checked but it looks very expensive."

His father said, "Well we have all the material from which your brother was preparing. I read in the newspaper about a free center called Study Fanatics. You can go test them out."

Saksham looked happy. He hugged his father. He went to his room and looked up the free coaching center. It was in Rohini West, New Delhi. That was indeed very far. He was not sure how he would make it there every morning at 6 a.m. But he was determined to go.

He set his alarm early next morning. He got up early and reached class on time, after taking a few buses and metro trains. He paid attention in class like never before. He went home and studied. He also pulled out his brother's old study material and devoured it.

He was going to give it his best. He wrote inspirational words and stuck the mon his mirror.

After a week of dedication, he felt like he was slacking. By now he had a group of friends at the coaching class. He decided to form study groups with them. They would stay back after class and review the material. This gave him more inspiration.

Saksham told the owner of a photocopy shop near his class to alert him whenever new study material came in. He learnt tricks from his fellow students on how to study and applied them. He prepared his own notes. This was

something he had never done before. He struggled initially but slowly he started getting better at it.

One of the aspirants, who had given the exam before and had reached the interview stage, became Saksham's good friend. He shared his notes with Saksham. Saksham added more updated information to those notes.

Every morning, Saksham was at the coaching and he studied day in and day out. It was as though he was a different person: motivated and dedicated. Things were falling in place automatically.

He found the right notes. He made the right set of friends. His family became supportive after they saw his performance during the practice exam. Even his brother gave him ideas on how to prepare and what were the important topics.

On the day of the exam, Saksham looked at the question paper and felt as though it had been prepared on the basis of what he had studied. First, he answered more than half the questions. He had been advised that he needed to get only fifty per cent to move to the next level of the exam. So he followed that advice. He was sure he would clear the prelims.

Soon after the exam, he started the preparation for the main exam. The results came out. Saksham had cleared the prelims. He was well-prepared for the mains. He cleared that as well.

At the time of the interview, he was asked what his biggest strength was while preparing for the exam. Saksham said, "Apart from the support of family and friends and regular hard-work, it felt as though the universe was on my side. Everything I had studied was asked in the exam. But I would not attribute it to luck. Rather I would say I deserve this position because I have become a believer."

One of the people on the interview panel asked, "A believer in what?"

Saksham replied, "A believer in the belief that no power in the universe can withhold anyone from anything he or she really deserves. I have worked towards this goal and I honestly believe that I deserve it."

When the results came out, Saksham had cleared the exam. He was going to be an IAS officer. His family and friends were overjoyed. He had cleared it in the first attempt. He had obtained a rank of sixty-seven.

Saksham was elated. He could not wait to start his training. He once again read the inspirational words and prepared for the next difficult journey. He had to ensure he deserved this post that he had received. He did not want to take it lightly.

I relate this story to my life thus:

3
Anyone can Achieve Anything, just Surrender to your Intentions – DJ

Monica was extremely unhappy.

She was reading an article on the yuppie generation to which she belonged. This referred to people born between the 1980s and the 1990s. The theory was the yuppie generation's expectation was much higher than reality. And because of this they were constantly unhappy.

They could not stay in one job for the rest of their lives. They considered themselves special and hence expected great things to happen to them. As any career required hard-work, most people from this generation were unhappy. They constantly compared themselves with their peers. Due to the unrealistic Facebook myth that everyone was happy and having fun, the people of this generation thought that they were the only ones who were unlucky with unrequited desires. Also, people from this generation are said to have changed seven professions.

Monica thought to herself that this could not be true. Even if this were true, she wanted to find a job that would make her happy. She wanted a job that she loved and she wanted to make a lot of money doing it. Although she did not want to be a millionaire, she wanted a comfortable lifestyle.

However, her problem was she did not understand what she really desired. She was easily distracted. She found too many things interesting. She believed she was good at everything and was unable to pinpoint one thing that she wanted to pursue for the rest of her life.

She was in the pursuit of happiness and money. She wanted it all: work, money and love. She wanted a family and a career. She was constantly tormented by people telling her that it was not possible to have everything and that she had to choose. She felt cheated and was angry that only women were told this. She wondered why men could have both a career and a family. Why could it not be the same for women?

She decided that she would have it all. This was her first conscious intention. All her actions would be influenced by this desire. She would let this thought influence her career and overarching life choices.

Monica was an orphan and had been brought up in a children's home. She had done well for herself. She had gone to management school and college. She had a job with a human rights organization as an activist. This was her sixth profession. Previously, she had worked as a content writer, an editor, a teacher, an office manager and an assistant. But she was not happy. She was lonely and felt dissatisfied about her career.

She thought about the article on the yuppie generation. If it was true that she was going to have seven professions (she had already had six), she had to choose the next profession wisely.

She was thirty years old. By forty, she hoped to have everything.

She decided to write a letter from the future to herself, visualizing herself ten years from now.

She sat down and began the letter.

Dear Monica,

Hope you are well in the year 2015. I write to you from 2025. I thought it would be nice to have a word with your future self as this may help you get to your future faster than you think. If I remember correctly, currently you are working in a human rights organization as an activist. However, you are not happy.

You want a family and a career. It is hard for a woman to balance home and career but remember nothing is impossible. If you can understand what you are actually thinking before taking a decision and pinpoint the exact intention behind it, you have the power to understand and influence the corresponding actions and results.

Let me assure you that ten years hence, you are happy as you followed this advice. You have two children who drive you crazy, but you love them a lot.

You are the best mother to them because you never had one. You also have a dog and a cat who are surprisingly your friends.

Also, in a smart career choice you decided to get into academics. You have plenty of scope for growth and time for family.

Monica paused after writing this sentence. She read it again. She had never considered getting into academics before. But the more she thought about it, the more it made sense. She would not only nurture her children but also help several young minds of the world.

But she did not have money to pursue further studies without a job. So she decided that she would do research on scholarships and fellowships. Monica was bright and an over-achiever. There was nothing stopping her, since she knew the true intentions behind her pursuits.

During her research, she had several distractions. People offered her jobs and interesting opportunities to travel abroad. But for the first time in life, she decided to stick to her decision. She turned these down and stayed in her current job while she carried out her research.

Monica was no longer just going with the flow. She was going to define the tide. Her actions would be calculated with precision and she would achieve her goals.

She had an interview for a part-time position that gave her the flexibility to pursue other things. Monica decided to seize this opportunity. She attended the interview for the position of liaison officer. It was a mundane job and more administrative in nature. It was not very challenging but she knew that her goal was something else. This was merely a means to an end and not the end itself.

She signed a three-year contract at the job and applied to higher studies programs with scholarships. The following year, she was accepted into one of the best programs in the country with full funding. The part-time position allowed her to continue earning money while pursuing higher studies free of cost. She was very happy with the state of affairs.

Monica got intellectual satisfaction from her studies and monetary stability from her job. She was sure that she would soon find someone to build a family with and even if she did not she decided to adopt children. The new guidelines on adoption permitted even single women to adopt.

With a positive attitude, Monica made inroads into the life she really wanted. She surrendered to her intentions and was on the path to achieving what she truly desired.

I relate this story to my life thus:

4
Dis-ease! Get out of it Immediately – DJ

"Just put it on the desk and I'll check it later," said Jamie, with his eyes glued to the television set.

The cricket match between Pakistan and India was being telecast live. The peon left the file on his desk and gave a light snort as though he knew this was going to happen. Giving no thought to the peon's reaction, Jamie got back to the match with a cup of coffee in his hand.

Jamie was infamous in his office for his laid back attitude. His good looks, awesome built and excellent taste in dressing added to his irresistible personality for those who didn't know him well enough. But most of the guys knew him to be a spoilt brat who never had to work for anything in his life.

And his list of delayed files was never ending. Jamie believed there was no need to waste time on something that could be done later.

His colleagues were fed up of his relaxed attitude as Jamie always turned to them for help at the last minute. It was unfair to his colleagues who had to take on extra load.

Jamie gave priority to hobbies and entertainment, instead of work.

There was a unanimous decision in the office regarding Jamie's appraisal. Even his best friend Mathew decided to let Jamie pay for his follies.

At the next board meeting, a few major decisions were to be made. The firm had run into bad times and was suffering losses. It was time to cut back. The company had to let go off many employees due to their incompetence and one of the names on this list was Jamie's.

It came as a shock to Jamie but to others it was a mere formality. They all knew it was coming.

While cleaning his desk, Jamie overheard some people whispering.

"Ha! Finally, the brat has been put down to sleep. He thought very highly of himself didn't he?"

"Mr I-can-do-it-all,"whispered a girl.

"Yeah! I wonder how he survived this long. The guy was of no use to the company," said another guy.

"Well, he was cute. But then again, of what good is a face if all it does is watch cricket matches," commented another girl.

Jamie was devastated. On top of being fired, he was now being teased.

Was this the life he had imagined? Was his life limited only to parties and cricket matches on TV?

On his way out, he bumped into Mathew who was promoted to the post of manager because of his excellent managing skills and dedication.

"So I guess this is goodbye," said Jamie. "Good luck, buddy. You are going to do wonders for this company."

Mathew felt bad for Jamie. The guy was after all his best friend and he couldn't digest something bad happening to him.

"Good luck to you too,"said Mathew, forcing a smile.

As Jamie was leaving, Mathew called out to him, "Hey Jamie! You are a great person. Your ideas are amazing. You have the talent to create a whole new world for yourself. So don't repeat the same mistake. Try to do everything in time."

Jamie just smiled and left. On his way back home, he could think of nothing but what people thought of him in office and what wrong he had done to get himself fired.

He thought about what Mathew had said on his way out. He thought to himself, "Was he right? Do I really have the talent but not the spirit?" This question kept haunting him for the rest of the night.

The next morning was a slow one. Jamie felt as though he was leading a purposeless life and this fact bugged him. He wanted to prove himself. He wanted to prove that he was a lot more than what was seen outside. And for that, he had to find a job.

The search began. Within four hours, Jamie had pored over every newspaper in the past week for an opening but nothing seemed interesting. He

felt lost and disappointed.

Jamie sat on his couch with a bottle of beer. Lost in his own world, he decided to take a break and switched on the television. As there was nothing good on it, he switched it off and turned on the radio for live commentary of a cricket match. It gave him the kind of thrill that nothing else could ever give him

The way the commentator added suspense to everything as he described what was happening on the ground was just amazing. Jamie remembered the time when he had anchored an event in his college and what a hit it had been. This brought back long lost memories.

And then there it was! Like a light bulb that had been switched on. Jamie thought to himself, "I am good looking, I have an excellent vocabulary and a deep voice that everyone likes. How could I not have thought of this before?"

Listening to the radio commentary gave him the idea of becoming a commentator himself. A new career was beckoning him and he had to plunge into it and reach unconquered heights.

Jamie soon got busy looking through his contacts list for anyone connected with cricket and then it finally struck him. His coach in college had a number of contacts in county cricket. Jamie was sure he could help him with that.

He was soon in his college campus fervently looking for Coach Thomson. Thomson, who was with youngsters on the field, saw Jamie. Surprisingly, he waved his hand to call Jamie over.

"How are you doing, young man?"

"Sir, I'm good. Just came to meet you. How are you doing?"

"Very fine. Tell me what brings you here?"

"You know how much I love cricket. I was just wondering if you can guide me to become a commentator. I know so much about the game."

"Well, for that you need to play a few years of good cricket first and really master the nuances. You can make a beginning now and work your way up. If you are really good, you're sure to reach there soon."

Jamie's eyes twinkled at the thought of getting on the field. Should he or shouldn't he, he wondered.

He knew he had to start afresh somewhere. So why not here?

The next morning Jamie came to the field with his bat and pads. He greeted Coach Thomson with a big smile and a twinkle in his eyes.

I relate this story to my life thus:

5
Do Right now Whatever you Can – DJ

The alarm buzzed and disturbed Amanda's sleep. It was seven when Amanda put her alarm on snooze. When the alarm buzzed for the fifth time, it was 8:15 a.m. As she hurried towards the bathroom, she slipped at least five times before she gained proper balance and saw what was happening around.

"Okay Amanda, don't panic. Every thing's gonna be alright. You just have to maintain your calm," said Amanda to herself in the mirror.

Today was a big day. The graduation ceremony of The East High School was to start in about half an hour and Amanda could barely remember anything. Last night, when her best friend reminded her of the event, Amanda was shocked to realize that she had forgotten such an important day in her life.

"Mom, I'm leaving. See you soon," she said, waving to her mother and blowing her a kiss.

When she reached school, the event had already started and the principal was addressing the audience. As Amanda made her entrance, the whole school stared at the girl who was late for her own graduation.

"You do realize this is your graduation ceremony, right?" whispered Samantha in Amanda's ears.

"Would you believe me if I said the alarm didn't ring?" replied Amanda. Samantha rolled her eyes in disbelief. "That's what I thought." muttered Amanda under her breath.

The ceremony was midway through when Amanda's teacher asked her to come to the corner. A carefree Amanda went towards Ms Bailey thinking that her teacher perhaps wanted to congratulate her. After all, she was Ms Bailey's favorite.

"Yes Ms Bailey?" asked Amanda.

With a confused look on her face, Ms Bailey replied "Amanda, I am sorry to say, but you aren't graduating today."

"How can that be, Ms Bailey? I got a twenty-seventy (20–70) in my SAT. That makes me eligible, doesn't it?" asked a worried Amanda.

"Yes Amanda you did, but unfortunately you failed to submit most of your assignments in time. If only you had been on time, you would have been up there on the stage," replied Ms Bailey, in a concerned tone.

Amanda was shocked. She couldn't move. She had been positive that she would graduate and go to the art school she had always wanted to go to. In fact, she had even prepared a portfolio to send to the school in Los Angeles.

"However, if you submit your articles and assignments by this Friday, you can graduate," continued Ms Bailey.

This gave a little hope to Amanda. She was now determined to finish all her pending assignments. With gratitude, she hugged her teacher.

"Thank you, Ms Bailey. I assure you that I won't disappoint you again. Thank you for this opportunity,"cried Amanda

On her way home, she explained everything to her friend Samantha. Amanda wondered how she could complete twelve assignments in just two days. It seemed almost impossible. Her friend Samantha offered to help her out and support her fully but even with help the assignments could not possibly be completed in such a short span.

Samantha and Amanda sat together and tried to copy Samantha's work with a few changes thrown in here and there. But it was impossible to get the art work done in forty-eight hours. The art work was time-consuming and required a lot of detailed work. Moreover, it would take time for the canvases to dry before they could give the final coating.

Amanda had to submit them in the previous semester itself but she had conveniently postponed them, thinking she would do them just before the finals. But a month before the final exams, she was down with chicken pox and it took a whole month for her to recover from it. Then her whole schedule got messed up and she was unable to finish anything. Neither could she prepare comfortably for her exams nor could she do her projects on time.

All Amanda could do at that time was appear for the exams without much preparation. But since her subjects demanded more of creative aptitude and designing skills, she managed to score well in all the exams. But the projects? Well, in the exam bustle and the thrill of graduating, Amanda had simply forgotten about them until Ms Bailey reminded her. But what could she do now? She couldn't waste a whole year. Amanda was in tears. She tried her best to get the assignments done but it wasn't possible.

Amanda's mother saw her daughter upset and thought she had learnt her lesson well. She knew it was necessary for her to learn it the hard way as no sweet talk or persuasion ever had any effect on her. She had always warned Amanda of the consequences of dillydallying and postponing her work to a later date. A stickler for time and punctuality, Amanda's mom was fed up of her daughter's easy-going attitude.

But now she felt that Amanda had learnt her lesson. A year was too much time to waste. So she decided to do something about it. She thought of talking to Ms Bailey.

The next day, Amanda's mother was at school talking to Ms Bailey about her daughter's assignments. She tried to persuade Ms Bailey to either give Amanda more time to finish her assignments or promote her based on her overall performance. Ms Bailey was not so sure she could override the school norms and do that kind of a thing.

"Ms Smith, I understand your anxiety. And Amanda is my favorite student. I wish she doesn't have to waste a year. I'll speak to the head of the department about this and put in my best word. Let's hope for the best," said Ms Bailey.

"Thank you so much. I really hope she decides in Amanda's favor," said Ms Smith.

The next day, Ms Smith received a phone call from Ms Bailey who told her in a cheerful voice that the department head had decided to give Amanda a week's time.

"She can submit seven out of the twelve assignments. And, of course, I'll guide her on how to begin and which ones to do first. Will you please ask

Amanda to get in touch with me ASAP?"

Ms Smith took a deep breath and heaved a huge sigh of relief. She thanked Ms Bailey and hurried home to give the good news to Amanda. Amanda was thrilled to hear this and rushed to school to talk to Ms Bailey.

She couldn't afford to lose any time this time.

I relate this story to my life thus:

6
Don't Prove Yourself to Others, rather Improve Yourself – DJ

Shweta was a well-built athletic woman. She was passionate, hardworking and full of energy. She loved to play badminton and enjoyed swimming. Shweta exercised regularly and ate a healthy diet. She had long black hair and a fair complexion. Being from Delhi, she loved bright colors. Her smile was genuine and heart-warming. She was a happy person who greeted everyone in the morning and helped old people. She fell in love with her childhood sweetheart and her family approved her choice readily.

Her fiancé Parminder was a man of different taste. Although he was from Delhi, he certainly did not look like a typical guy from the city. Parminder was not very tall and was rather skinny. He had a sharp jaw and a wheatish complexion. He had lived most of his life outside India and was used to life in France more than Delhi. He was no longer sure that Shweta was the right girl for him.

Parminder decided to talk to Shweta about how he felt. He said, "This is not easy for me to say but I do not believe we are well suited to each other. You will not fit in well with the life in France." Shweta was heartbroken and asked shakily, "What are you hinting at?" He said, "Perhaps it is time we move on since I do not believe you would be happy there." Shweta quickly said, "I can change and be the woman you want. I will be happy as long as I am with you." She was willing to do anything to win him back and pleaded with him.

Parminder decided to give Shweta a chance to change herself. It began with her needing to lose weight. Then she had to change her choice in clothes, followed by dental work and a haircut to make her look more stylish. Shweta did it all and she did it with a smile on her face. She changed what she ate and wore and even the way she smiled.

Shweta enrolled in language classes because she wanted to impress Parminder with her multi-lingual skills. She hoped this would prove to him that she was as good as any woman abroad. As time passed she began to lose weight. She excitedly told Parminder about her progress. "Today I completed

two months at the gym. I have been very particular about what I eat. I am very thin and fit now. And yes, I have bought all the clothes you suggested.”This went on for some time.

Shweta was no longer the athletic woman she used to be. Her bone structure began to change and she started having health issues. She used to be a confident woman who never considered herself overweight. However, as she began to lose weight, she constantly felt that she had to be thinner. Her dietician advised her against it. She tried to explain to Shweta that she was underweight and losing any more weight would lead to health issues but she would not listen.

Shweta now wore clothes in sober shades to match the fashion of women abroad. She got braces to fix her teeth. The day she cut her hair, Shweta cried herself to sleep. She was not only proud of her long hair but it was also part of her tradition and culture.

On his next visit to Delhi, Parminder was pleased to see this new person: thin, lanky and dressed in shades of grey with a short bob and a more ‘appropriate’ smile. He agreed to marry her. Shweta was thrilled that she had succeeded in her efforts. She finally had her love back.

The wedding took place in the midst of great pomp and show. Several relatives and friends had gathered for a grand celebration. The food was a mix of spicy Punjabi for the local guests as well as some strange dishes from France, including liver pates.

The day finally came for Shweta to accompany her husband to Paris. She said goodbye to her family. As she tried to pick up her bag, she struggled a lot. She felt weak and was unable to lift it. She was confused as she had never faced this problem earlier.

Shweta then caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror. Suddenly, it was as if a fog had been lifted. She looked at herself. Rather,she looked at this strange new person who looked back at her in the mirror. She stared and the stranger stared back. The person in the mirror looked rather unhappy.

Shweta was very confused because she did not like the new person she had become. Her introspection was cut short with her family calling her, "Shweta, *jaldi* (hurry), *jaldi* (hurry)!"

She hurriedly carried her bag, toppling it several times down the stairs. She was quickly ushered in the car and was soon in the airport.

The newly married couple headed to their home abroad. They soon arrived in Paris. Shweta was well-prepared with her language skills and her new appearance to blend in with the locals.

One morning, they decided to climb Mount Saleve. Parminder told Shweta that it was an easy climb and she, being an athletic woman, would have no problem. However, Shweta struggled a lot with the climb. Within ten minutes of the hike, she was unable to continue. She started turning red in the face. She felt dizzy and refused to go any further. Her husband was rather annoyed and said, "Did you not tell me you have been going to the gym? The girl that I knew used to be able to hike and climb with a smile on her face. I don't know why you are behaving like this."

Parminder left her gasping at the bottom of the hill and continued his climb. His words rang in her ears. She rushed to a nearby café as she did not want to get emotional in public. She ordered a cup of coffee and went to the ladies' room. She washed her face and looked deep into her eyes.

Shweta smiled as widely as she could. She wiped her tears, fixed her makeup and hair. She composed herself, reined in her emotion and said aloud, "I am Shweta." She repeated this several times, as though she was trying to convince herself about something.

Something changed in her that day. She realized that, in her pursuit to prove herself to her husband and show him that she could be the woman he wanted, she had lost herself. As she sat in the café alone, sipping her coffee, she decided to take control of her life.

That night, over dinner, she confronted her husband. She said, "I want to talk to you, dear husband. Today you said that I am not the girl you knew. And you are right. This woman who stands before you is the woman you created in

your head. You wanted me to change, so I did. You like what you see but this is what you don't see: I am weak and underweight and hence unhealthy. My smile is false and it hides my displeasure at having to change everything I like."

Parminder was about to deny that none of this was his fault. However, Shweta read his mind and said, "I do not blame you. It was my decision to make all these changes to prove to you that I could be what you wanted me to be. I was wrong. Instead, I should have assured you that I would continue to improve myself in ways that preserved my true essence and yet let me adjust to the new life in France."

Shweta's candidness changed something in her husband. Their relationship transformed from that moment on. He started visualizing her as his partner. He saw her as someone strong and smart.

Shweta reverted to her original habits, while continuing to improve her French skills. She was ready and willing to try new things. She once again changed but this time she carefully considered the things that made her a better person. Her husband loved her more and more each day as he was proud to be with this woman.

One morning, as Shweta was hurrying to catch the bus, she caught a glimpse of her reflection in the bus window. She smiled as wide as she could. The person looking back at her was neither the woman from Delhi nor the woman who could not climb Mount Saleve. She liked what she saw. She continued smiling as she said, "*In billet sílvous plait* (one ticket please)."

I relate this story to my life thus:

7
You are Big Enough to Make a Difference Every Moment – DJ

"I want to die. I want to die. I want to die. I want to die. I want to die," Alice thought repeatedly.

Alice was just thirty years old but she had already given up on life. She wrote a blog under the name 'Mr Charles.' In order to break the stereotypical attributes attached to women writing about worldly issues, she had assumed the identity of a man.

For a long time, she enjoyed the fact that no one knew it was her and that people read Mr Charles' blog posts with great interest. She received comments such as these:

"It is wonderful to see a man espouse these issues with such passion."

"You Rock Charles!"

"Charles the man!"

She also received comments such as these:

"You are a pretentious man who pretends to understand the plight of women. You know nothing just like John snow from Game of Thrones!"

"What do you know about gender discrimination????"

"Who do you think you are, mr big stuff???"

Despite the reach of her blog, Alice was very depressed with her life. She had clinical depression and had run out of money to buy pills to keep her depression in check. She wanted to kill herself.

Alice had been looking at her wrists for hours now. She had been wondering how it would feel to run a knife over them. She had read somewhere that slicing an artery causes a fountain-like effect on the blood squirting out.

Alice was unable to fight the demons in her head. She stood before the mirror and blurted out aloud, "You good-for-nothing woman. You have amounted to nothing!"

She looked at her reflection and thought, "I am so very ugly." She laughed out aloud in pain. She walked over to the refrigerator and opened it. She grabbed a stale donut from inside. She took a big bite of it. It tasted like cardboard. She continued to chew the stale donut. She swallowed a large piece and was about to take another bite when a voice in her head said, "No wonder no one loves you. You are so fat."

Alice got immensely angry. It was the voice of her critical sister resonating in her head. She chucked the donut in the garbage can and said, "Who needs to eat? Anyway I am going to die alone."

She decided to write one last blog post before she killed herself. Alice sat before her laptop and typed ferociously. The keyboard groaned under the speed of her typing. The 'click-click' of the keys was the sound most familiar to Alice.

Alice was almost done typing her poston the new constitution of Nepal when there was a 'ping.' A new comment had been posted on one of her old blogs.

Instinctively, Alice clicked on the notification to see what it said. It was a comment on her first blog post about the need for inclusivity of women in the peace processes and peacekeeping missions of the United Nations.

"You do not know what your talking about. Also, your grammar is terrible."

Alice was extremely annoyed at this comment. First of all, she did not need this right now as she was about to end her life. Secondly, it was such an old post. And thirdly, how dare some idiot challenge her grammar skills. She was about to delete the comment when a wave of anger took over her.

She decided to take on this fool and teach him or her a lesson. Anyway, she had nothing to lose. She tried to figure out who this was. The handle name read ZOO_Hologico.

Alice thought, "Wise guy or gal, eh!"

She started typing her angry retort. Then she hit 'reply' for the world to see her wrath.

"Well anonymous reader who is too afraid to show who he or she truly is and hides behind nicknames to insult others, before talking about my grammar, why don't you recheck your comment? I think you meant You do not know what you are and not Your…Show yourself to the world if you are going to trash someone's work. Atleast be brave enough to own your criticism instead of hiding behind a name like ZOO_Hologico."

Alice admired her comment. She was pleased with it. She waited to see if ZOO would reply. After a few moments, she went back to finishing her blog post. She was proofreading it when there was another ping.

New comment from ZOO_hologico.

Alice was extremely angry. She thought she had shut this creep for good. "Guess I was wrong and I need to dish out a more bitter medicine," she thought to herself.

She read the comment. As she read it, her eyebrows rose slowly. Soon they were so high that they looked like they would fly off her face.

Alice got up and paced around the room.

"How dare he… How dare he…," she began to murmur. "This has to be a guy. Such arrogance! And how did he know? How could he know?"

She walked over to the laptop and re-read the comment:

"Talk about hiding your identity! You sit in front of your laptop and pretend to be a know-it-all. You cannot even handle simple criticism. Claiming to be Charles! You are not Charles and I know it."

Alice could not believe it. How did this person know that she was not who she claimed to be? She wondered if this person knew her true identity. She started talking to herself. But it looked like she was talking to her laptop.

"No! ZOO cannot know. No one knows!"

She had to respond. And she had to be careful not to expose herself or let him expose her.

She thought for a few moments. She did not know what to type. She only knew she had to respond and she had to be diplomatic.

She typed several responses and then hit 'delete.'Finally, after about half an hour of toiling on her response, she hit 'send.'

Ping!

New comment from ZOO_hologico.

"Nooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo," Alice yelled. How could he have replied so soon? It had taken her so long to craft the perfect response and he had replied almost instantly.

Alice was so caught up in this conversation that she forgot all about posting her last blog. She also forgot that she was going to kill herself.

The comments from ZOO and the replies from Alice continued, till Alice decided that it would be safer to move the conversation to a private window on the blog. She did not want the public to know she was not Charles.

So she pinged ZOO and sent him a private invite. ZOO accepted it. They began to chat in a formal fashion. Alice was determined to find out who this person was and how he knew her secret.

Alice was so preoccupied with this new form of contact that she no longer considered killing herself. She went to bed that night thinking and hoping that ZOO would message her the next day so that she could figure out his or her identity.

At the other end of the chat conversation was eight-year-old Zack, who was laughing at his little joke. He had written to Alice just like that, as he was bored. But now he was enjoying this conversation. He went to bed thinking that night, "I hope he is not offended and I can make him my friend. He seems a nice person." He giggled thinking of his comments. He wondered if Charles had figured out his reference to Charles Darwin, the 'evolution theory' scientist. Zack did not know Alice's secret. He had made a casual remark that had inadvertently made Alice reach the conclusion that he knew her true identity.

Little did Zack know that his comments that day had stopped Alice from taking her life. He had played such a huge role in keeping her alive, just by providing her simple human contact. An eight-year-old boy was big enough to

make a small difference to Alice's life. His intervention had an extremely important impact in shaping her future.

I relate this story to my life thus:

8
Excitement Begins at the Moment of Decisions – DJ

Years had simply flown by. Meg was surprised how quickly the three years of undergraduate college had gone by. Soon it would be time to bid goodbye and wish good luck to everyone. She looked around at the wonderful green campus that had been home to silly talks, ambitious plans, dim-witted antics, smart pranks, small tussles,verbal brawls and finally patching up.

The college campus had stood a silent witness to all their fun and excitement. They were a group of eight friends. Mark, Amy, Steve, Dave, Rosanna and Meg were really close. Edward and Patrick sometimes hung around with them but most of the times they preferred to be alone, for which they were teased endlessly.

But Ed and Pat were the heart and soul of the group. Whenever they were around, there was not a single morose moment. They brought cheer and high spirits to the gang. Pat's new car was a dream in which they went on long drives across the countryside.

Meg was all alone cherishing these moments, which she assumed would never come back. Rosanna and Amy were busy with their summer jobs and they hardly had time to answer anyone's calls. Dave was practicing hard for his selection matches the next week and Mark had to rush back home as his mother was seriously ill.

Meg was alone in the campus reminiscing the great times they had shared in college when Steve slapped her on her shoulder. Meg turned around in surprise. She wasn't expecting him. He was supposed to be working on his thesis papers.

Seeing Steve was a pleasant surprise. Meg hugged him tight and screamed in delight, "Wow! What are you doing here? Aren't you supposed to be with your professor buttering him up for a quick analysis of your papers?"

"Yes, I am doing that. But I was fed up of that old face who snorted each time he looked up from his papers. So I thought I needed a solid break from

the boring setting and be hugged by a charming pretty girl who is so lost in her college. So tell me, why are you so morose?"

"Nothing much, rather nothing at all. I was just missing you guys. I have got nothing better to do till my results are actually out. I don't want to take up a job that will need me to slog and kill my creative self. My plans are to start my own art school and I have to wait. I have nothing much to do till then."

"Hmm! I know it's difficult being the only one left out and not having anything to do for the moment. Look at me, I am longing for help. I could do with a research assistant who can help me with my work. And with such a pretty lady around, I am sure my research would go on well. Plus, there is no chance of you getting bored at all, ever. What do you say?"

"No friend would ever say yes, even if she wanted to, after listening to the manner in which you have described the work. I seem to be more of a distraction rather than a real help to you."

"Come on! You know I am kidding. We have worked together as a team before and the results have been fabulous. Meg, you know I'm right."

"I'll think it over and let you know, Steve."

"What's there to give it a thought? I need a friend's help and you're free. It's that simple."

"Oh! If you put it that way, I'm game. When do we start?"

"Today. My place, obviously."

"Obviously."

Meg was happy that she would see more of Steve and she would have less time to brood over being left alone. The mere thought of being occupied was enough to bring cheer to her face. The moment she decided to help Steve, thoughts of being together with him for long hours started tickling her. She had always had a soft corner for Steve who was quite a handsome guy. His persona exuded the confidence and warmth of a strong person who would always be by your side no matter what. She had always been drawn to him in a strange manner and she knew he too harbored special feelings for her.

Meg and Steve had a great time preparing the thesis together. Though Meg was more of a clerical help, she broke the boring monotony of routine for Steve, who simply loved her presence. The high spirits reflected in their work and soon the thesis was completed. Steve gave Meg a lot of credit. He called her his lucky charm.

Steve often brought up the topic of Meg's dream art school, but she never gave him proper answers. To Steve it seemed as though she was postponing the decision and evading the topic, not just with Steve but with herself as well. It appeared as though she feared taking the big leap and expected wonders to happen. Steve was surprised at her escapist attitude in making decisions. Steve decided to wait till his thesis was over to probe further. Now that it was done, he wanted to get answers out of Meg.

"Meg, you have to start working towards your goal. Your art school is not going to happen overnight like Jack's magic beanstalk. You have to plan for it. Now that you have the required qualifications and you know you are the best, what's stopping you? What is holding you back?"

"Steve, I'm scared. What if I'm not able to deliver properly? What if I'm not able to teach others? There is a difference between knowing your subject and being able to teach others. I am chickening out, you could say."

"That's why you should have started taking some classes for beginners and then worked your way up. You were offered so many openings."

"I know. But I…I was so confused."

"I'll tell you what. There's a fantastic school in our area looking for fine arts graduates who can teach the nuances of art to kids. You go there for some time; the confidence will seep in automatically. I can see you shining already in excitement. The only thing is you will not admit it to yourself. Stop lying to your own self. Be positive and look out for the best."

Meg didn't know what to say. Steve's words were so stern that she could say no more. She just nodded her head. Steve jumped high in joy. Meg too felt a burden off her chest. For months she had been dillydallying. But now, with the decision made, her mind wandered off to newer things.

"How would it be teaching kids? How would I go about it?" she wondered. She decided to be a fun teacher like the one who had taught her years ago. Also, she would take the children on nature visits to draw inspiration from nature and…

She was so excited the moment she made up her mind.

I relate this story to my life thus:

9
Focus More on Big Earnings than Small Savings – DJ

Peepli had always been a penny pincher. He was always saving one rupee here, one rupee there,never focusing on the big picture.

One day, Peepli went to a fortuneteller. He wanted to know when he would be rich. He said, "I do my best to be frugal. I take care of my expenses. But I want to be rich. How soon will I be able to save enough to be rich?"

The fortune teller was a fraud. However, he was a wise man. He thought he would teach Peepli a valuable lesson. "Hmm…. What I see in your future child is no money. You do not spend on anything. You do not enjoy life. You do not work. You are looking only at the small savings. Look at the big picture, child."

Peepli was scared, "What do you mean no money? I need money. I want to be rich and you say I will not have any money. What can I do?"

The fortune teller continued in his dreamy tone, "Hmmm… Peepli, you need big earnings."

Peepli looked confused. "Big earnings? What does that mean?"

The fortune teller went on, "Multiple sources of income are always better than small savings. Saving is good but only saving will not do. You need to work hard too."

Peepli thanked him for his advice and went home. That day he started applying to job openings for a French teacher. His French was good and he could certainly give tuitions while he found more work.

The following day, he started looking up the newspapers ads. He found an opening for a librarian. He thought that could also be something he could pursue. So Peepli started teaching French at a local school one day a week and working part-time as a librarian on the weekends.

He returned to the fortune teller and proudly told him of the jobs he had taken up. "Now has my future changed? Please do tell me. Will I be rich?"

The fortune teller knew Peepli to be very lazy. Though he was smart, he never worked. He was a qualified person with a masters in economics but he

refused to work hard to make a living. "Hmmm… Peepli you need to find work that is rewarding. You need to give back to the society. Finding two temporary jobs cannot trick fate."

Peepli went home even more worried. He had been saving all his life and yet he had a small bank balance. He had studied only because his parents had forced him to do so. Now that his family was no more, there was no one to push him. They had left him some inheritance. He decided to use of his economic knowledge and make a few investments. He made a few smart investments and got returns from them. He kept working as a teacher and librarian. His bank balance was gradually increasing. He then started volunteering at a non-governmental organization to give back to the society.

He decided to take the fortune teller's advice and spend some of the money he had made. He took one of his friends, who was a hedge fund investor, to dinner. At dinner, he asked his friend several questions to gain more knowledge about his business. His friend put up with him and patiently answered Peepli's questions. Finally,he was frustrated and said, "May I please eat my food? If you would like to know more, come to my office on Wednesday and I will have someone give you a tour and answer all your questions."

Peepli thanked him. On Wednesday, he showed up at his friend's office with his notepad, eager to learn everything. Peepli was very pleased when he found out the salaries of the people employed there. He then asked his friend if he could intern with the company. His friend told him that the stipend was not much. Peepli agreed anyway.

So from Monday to Friday Peepli went to work at the investment company. He was using his economics degree for the first time. On weekends, he continued to work as a librarian. He stopped teaching French at the school and started giving private tuitions in his free time. He was making a good living now with multiple sources of income.

He was so busy that he had no time to return to the fortune teller. He did not even realize time fly. Soon his three-month internship came to end. He was offered a junior position at the company. Peepli was pleased, as this would

mean a well-paying job. He was tempted to quit the library and tuitions but he remembered the fortune teller's advice about multiple sources of income.

For a few years, things went on smoothly. Then recession struck. The company started downsizing. The first ones to be fired were the junior employees. Peepli was gutted out. But due to his other jobs, he had managed to have healthy savings in the bank. He understood the importance of multiple sources of income.

He went back to teaching at the school, taking tuitions and working as a librarian. The NGO where he had continued to volunteer offered to pay him a small stipend. He went in search of the fortune teller to thank him but his shop was shut.

One day, while walking to work he saw the fortune teller drinking tea at a roadside stall. But he did not look like a fortune teller. He walked up to him and asked him,"Are you not the man I visited for advice?"

The fortune teller looked at him and said, "Ah yes, Peepli. How are you?"

Peepli said, "Good, thanks to your advice."

Peepli narrated the happenings of the last few years. The fortune teller laughed and said, "But child, I was only giving you advice as an elder. Honestly, I am a fraud."

Peepli looked shocked, "What! A fraud! But I followed your advice and…"

The fortune teller completed his sentence, "And things turned out well. So why are you unhappy? I meant no harm. Forget all things said and done, I did give you good advice."

Peepli was angry as he headed off to work. On the way, the depth of the fortune teller's words sank into him—focus more on big earnings rather than small savings.

He had been tricked but he felt grateful for the advice. During recession, he had a decent bank account and three jobs. He felt blessed. He laughed and no longer felt any resentment towards the old man.

I relate this story to my life thus:

10

There are Always Ideas and Opportunities in the Air, just have the Right Vision – DJ

Douglas was sitting idle in a café, staring at the people around. This was his favorite hangout and anyone who knew Douglas knew where to find him. He was sipping his favorite cappuccino when Tony walked in through the door looking for him.

"Hey Doug! Where have you been? I have been all over the place."

"What brings you to me, Tony? Something missing in your place or what? I didn't steal it." Douglas smirked

"Come on! People like you and me don't steal. We own things. We create them. Excuse me for saying 'we.'I actually mean 'you.' You are simply terrific. I remember the last start-up you initiated. It was amazing. Though it was quite sad that it didn't see the light of the day."

"I have a principal, Tony. I never have regrets in life. I never have any qualms about what I do or believe in. I do what I believe in. Sometimes things click and at other times they don't. Now what brings you here? Any new ideas bubbling?"

"No. That's your job. I really wish I could be as smart as you and generate ideas by the dozens. I am itching for a new project now."

"You have come to me at the right time. The last one week I have been watching people here quite closely and one thing is constantly nagging me – why they don't look around at all. The café guys spend so much on the décor and the interiors but most people come here out of sheer habit. Only those who come here alone or are waiting for someone happen to look at the décor. It's such a pity that these beautiful paintings and these terrific walls have no admirers. I was wondering what if these things started communicating aloud with the visitors. The walls need to talk more. I mean, if they could carry graffiti or a catchphrase that is changed every day, don't you think many more people would come here just to take a look at what's up on the walls? What do you think?"

"I know. I love catchy one-liners and graffiti. They lighten up your mood instantly. In a café, they can surely serve as icebreakers or conversation starters. Plus, who can be wittier than you? All you have to do is moot the idea to the management."

"This is just one of the thoughts that crossed my mind while sitting here. But if you are actually serious about a new start-up, I'll get back to you soon."

Some days later, Douglas rang up Tony and asked him to meet him at a certain place.

Douglas was gazing at an empty plot of land. The plot was in an interesting location and that was the reason why Doug had asked Tony to come over. It was bang opposite an official complex, which was bustling with commercial activity. It had a huge office-going population.

Doug's idea was to set up a music café that not only had live bands playing but also encouraged karaoke singing by the general public. It would also host stand-up comedy shows every week to serve as stress busters to the working population.

Tony was always game to Doug's ideas. The hunt for investors and promoters began. Soon their plan went into action. The construction took six months and the interiors took another two months. Within ten months, Doug and Tony saw their brainchild take the shape of a plush upmarket music café, whose opening was eagerly awaited.

Doug ensured that the music café was the talk of the town. He took care of the promotions himself. The walls of the café were filled with graffiti. The following Monday, the café was thrown open to the public. People's hot favourite tracks were played. The café ran a special offer on the first day. The visitors to the café had a good time and went home with a terrific impression of the place.

Soon, the Doug and Tony music café became the most happening place in the city. The stand-up comedy shows were fully booked in advance and the graffiti was well appreciated. Doug had assumed full responsibility of the graffiti; it was one of the main attractions for some people who came to the

café everyday to read the terrific one-liners from Doug. Some of them even contributed lines and suggestions. The café was a regular hangout for most of the office-goers from the office complex opposite. They visited the café late evening and spent time till night.

"Doug, your idea is terrific. It is immensely satisfying and it's also giving us great returns. Your ideas on the walls, which carry a musical theme or clues for customers to figure out, are catching on well. I hear that youngsters from all over the city are here during the day time to check out the wall. This is what is actually getting us the moolah. The youngsters in the daytime and the adults later in the day. What a wonderful idea! I love you for this, Doug!"

"You know Tony opportunities don't knock at your doors. They are here simply, always. You just have to recognize them when you see them. Just that day when you spoke to me, an idea came to my mind and things started to shape up later. I simply had to explore the option with foresight and vision, for the idea in my mind to take shape in reality. I had to ensure its success. So the location was really important. Tony, we have to be on our toes to actually keep it going strong. People tend to get bored with things quite soon."

"You mean more work? I thought we could relax now," said Tony, almost fainting.

I relate this story to my life thus:

11
If you are Attached to Results, Chances are you are Not Following your Passion – DJ

The dazzling lights and the fierce competition among the photographers to get a glimpse of the new singing sensation brought a sense of accomplishment to Maroon Jack. He had finally achieved what he had been dreaming of since childhood. This was his first concert. Two of his albums had released in quick succession earlier this year and his popularity had forced Stubbs BBQ in Austin to invite him for a performance.

The crowd went wild. Their heartthrob was on stage and they were dying to hear his golden voice, which had mesmerized them in his first two albums.

And true to his image, he set the stage on fire. He came, he sang and he conquered the hearts of the thousands present there. All his popular numbers set the tempo racing. When he was sure the crowd needed some rest, he introduced his new songs, which would take some time to find a place in their hearts and climb up the charts.

Maroon Jack was the latest singing sensation. His debut albums had sold like hot cakes the moment they hit the stands. He was hot property now. Girls went berserk on catching a glimpse of their star performing live on stage.

Jack felt elated. He knew he had arrived and anonymity was a thing of the past now. He loved the adulation he received from people. People mobbed him on the streets, begged him for autographs and longed to pose for pictures with him. He enjoyed all this. It was a dream come true.

To be recognized by people was indeed a dream come true. His numbers were chart busters weeks on end. They were played in every discotheque and bar. The admiration and popularity worked like a drug for Jack, like it did to any artist.

Jack was enjoying every moment of it. And why shouldn't he? He had spent years in isolation composing music. Music was his inherent passion and his guitar was his only addiction. He ate with it, slept with it and took it wherever

he went. Any time, any tune could hit his mind and mood and he could not wait to listen to how it sounded on his acoustic guitar.

After the stupendous success of Jack's first concert, many more concerts followed. Everywhere he went, he created the same aura. Soon he was the highest paid pop star in the city. People had to wait for months to get him to perform at the same venue. He was rarely in town to perform for his home audience. Jack became a busy man and an important one too, but he could not escape the curse that adulation brings with it. With so much travel, recognition and a VIP status, everything finally got to his head. Somewhere down the line, music became the biggest casualty.

Earlier, he sang from his heart. His songs had a deep emotional connect and his music tugged the heart strings. But now he began to sing only for the crowd. He played only the music the crowd loved. He even penned songs that were bound to go well with the masses. He lost the soulful connect in the process.

The songs that came straight from his heart a year ago were now marked with frivolity. He could not identify with them at all. They meant nothing to him. They were simply songs that would add to the feathers in his cap and take him a step ahead in the competitive landscape, which was now teeming with several singers. Jack had lost himself in the crowd. His guitar yearned for him to play with the same kind of passion he had played some time ago.

Jack met the same fate of any artist who loses his passion in the midst of fame. Fame is an ugly friend, which brings with it only enemies. Rather one loses whatever friends he has in the process. Jack felt alienated and isolated. His passion for music died. And with it died his dreams and vision that had brought him to the podium of fame and recognition.

The true soul of a singer was no more. This started to reflect in his singing style. His songs lacked a personal touch and a soulful quality. Soon the crowds started to thin. His numbers slipped down the charts and suddenly his demand was reduced to a mere zero.

Nobody paid any attention to him and he soon became a thing of the past. No one wanted him suddenly. It pained him to enter a restaurant like a

nobody, with no one vying for his attention anymore. He was overcome with severe depression. Soon he became addicted to sleeping pills. Without the pills he couldn't even sleep for two hours. Severe anxiety hit him. That was when he met Anne.

Anne was a plain-faced blonde, tall with a lithesome figure. She was a great lover of music. When she saw Jack alone in a park, sitting on a bench without his famous acoustic guitar, which had been an integral part of him till sometime ago, she knew there was something wrong.

"Hi Jack. May I?" she said pointing to the place next to him.

Jack was surprised. It had been so long since anyone wanted to spend time with him. He nodded, not interested in initiating a conversation with her.

"You seem lost. What's wrong?"

"I don't know. But everything seems wrong. Nothing is the same."

"Life has its own ways of teaching things to us. There are times when it gives a lot to us and teaches us the value of love and the importance of our own passion. Then it takes it all away in a moment. We forget the significance of being true to ourselves. Tell me, how long has it been since you actually played for yourself? I mean, you have played and sung for others for a long time now. But somewhere down the line, it seems as though you have lost the connect with yourself. And that is worse than losing any number of fans."

Jack's eyes were wet with tears. He knew he had lied to his own self. His childhood passion had lost itself in the hordes of fans. He went back home. His guitar stood like an orphan in the corner, beckoning him to adopt him again. Jack picked it up in his arms, hugged it and kissed it. His fingers moved deftly on its strings to weave pure magic. Anne stood at the door mesmerized with the pure harmony. Jack was back.

I relate this story to my life thus:

12

Whenever we Express Love to Others, we Always Think about Them and whenever we are Angry With others, We Expect from them – DJ

Nina and Kamaal were the perfect couple. Nina was a vagabond. She had never imagined settling down in one place. She had built her whole career on her desire to travel. Nina was a travel writer and that meant frequent trips to different places. She loved to visit places. She wanted to be a citizen of the world. However, Kamaal was more stable in terms of where he wanted to live and what kind of life he wanted to have. He needed to settle in one place to take care of his parents. He was an ICT (information and communications technology) engineer in a multinational corporation. Nina was understanding and accepted Kamaal's responsibilities and Kamaal was supportive of Nina's career and life choices.

Although they envisioned their life's trajectories differently, they both were also similar in their tastes and preferences. When Nina and Kamaal went to a restaurant, the conversation would be something like this:

Nina: "Honey, do you want to split?"

Before she could finish her sentence, Kamaal would say, "Yes, I was also thinking of getting the chicken parmesan."

Both of them were also headstrong and opinionated. They had both been commitment-phobic before they met each other. Neither of them compromised on how they felt and what they wanted. When they finally decided to settle down and get married, their friends were baffled.

On the day of the wedding, Amy, Nina's friend, broke a coconut on the ground.

Thud! crack! splatter!

Everyone was shocked for a moment. Amy said, "This is for having accomplished the impossible." The whole crowd was in splits.

As their married life continued rather blissfully, they communicated their feelings well. They could literally finish each other's sentences. It would sometimes frighten Nina how well and how deepher husband could see into her mind. She too knew her husband's mind but not as much as she would have liked to.

Their bond was so strong that they often placed themselves in each other's shoes to come up with viable solutions to their problems. One of the topics of discussion had been babies. Nina did not want to be a mother while her husband wanted to be a father.

Kamaal said, "Wife, we will not have children until you want them. This must be a joint decision. But I would love to have kids. Strangely enough, I never thought of any of these things until I met you. You make me want these things."

Nina adored how supportive and patient her husband was being. She hugged him and said, "I really do love you. I appreciate and cherish you."

One day, Nina and Kamaal went to visit Kamaal's parents. Now the two of them had been married for a year. The pressure to have children was mounting from both Kamaal's and Nina's parents. During dinner, the topic came up. Kamaal's mother asked, "So Nina, what have you decided? Are you going to give me a grandchild before I am too old to spoil him or her?"

Kamaal knew that this was a sensitive topic for his wife. However, knowing the woman she was, he decided to let her tackle the question, as he had complete faith in her abilities to hold her own. Nina said, "We did discuss it and are not ready yet."

Her mother-in-law replied, "You may not be ready but I am not so sure about my son. Also, do think of others as well. Is your mother not dying to have a grandchild?"

Nina started to squirm as she was uncomfortable. What she really wanted to say was, "It is none of your business."

But she had deep respect for her husband's parents. So she simply said, "I do understand that both my mother and you would love for me to have a

child. But it's a big responsibility and we do not want to take this decision lightly."

Nina looked at her husband for reassurance. However, he did not say anything as he was letting Nina tackle the round. Nina felt abandoned. She could not understand why her husband was not helping her out.

Her mother-in-law kept badgering her and Nina began to get very angry. She thought that she had made a life-altering decision to reduce her travel so that she could stay with her husband and now he was not supporting her. She began to think that all the discussions they had regarding children were only true behind closed doors. He was not willing to stand up for her when the time came. He was not saying anything while his mother kept pushing her.

Finally, Kamaal's dad stepped in and said, "Stop forcing your daughter-in-law. I think you have given her enough grief for one night. Besides, it is getting late. I am sure they have work in the morning."

Nina gave her father-in-law a grateful smile. They bid goodbye and left. In the car, Nina could no longer hold back her anger. She asked her husband, "Why didn't you support me? So all your promises about being patient and willing to wait were only for my ears and not your mother's? Just be honest with me, Kamaal. Please, no more lies."

Kamaal was surprised at this reaction from his wife. He pulled over. He took his extremely angry wife in his arms. Nina tried to break free from his hold as she was furious and deeply hurt. Kamaal held her tight and said, "I am sorry if you felt abandoned. That was not my intention at all."

Nina, still in her husband's embrace, retorted, "What did you expect your silence to achieve?"

Kamaal let go of Nina slightly so that she could look into his eyes while he said, "I believed that you could hold your own and so did not intervene."

Seeing that she had calmed down slightly, Kamaal let her go completely and pulled out his phone from his pocket and said, "I want you to see something."

Nina read the text from his mother a few days ago. It said,

"Son, would you like me to talk to your wife about having children? I know it is something you want and perhaps I can help in convincing her. I can also speak with her mother and we could both try."

He said, "Keep reading."

She saw her husband's response,

"Dear mother, I love you and while I appreciate your concern, I assure you that Nina and I will have a conversation and decide if and when we are ready to have children. With all due respect, it is none of your business."

Nina looked up with tears brimming in her eyes. Her husband had said exactly what she had said as well as what she had refrained from saying.

Kamaal wiped away her tears and said, "I thought my mother would perhaps be more convinced when she saw that you and I said the same thing individually."

Nina smiled through the tears and said, "I apologize for jumping to conclusions. I was overtaken by anger and I thought that you had abandoned me. I started expecting a lot from you, as I felt you were not doing what you ought to do and you did not care enough. I could only think of myself."

Kamaal smiled and said, "I understand. Whenever we are overcome by anger, we expect more. We can only see faults; we are blinded somehow. However, we are a team. Remember that. Life is hard but if we remember that we are a team we can work through anything."

Nina was grateful to her loving husband. The veil of anger lifted and she could see things more clearly. She wished she had not flown off the handle so quickly. She promised herself that she would try to see her husband's true self in both happy moments and moments of anger and disagreement. They drove home happy and contented, with a renewed promise to work through their problems together.

I relate this story to my life thus:

13
Children have the Power to Reduce or Increase your Patience and it Never Remains the Same – DJ

"Come back here! You need to finish your milk."

"No! You cannot play before you finish your homework."

Erin was an *au pair* (babysitter/nanny) in Geneva. She was a Dutch citizen. It was her year off before she started university. She was seventeen years old and ready to see the world.

However, she felt like she had bitten more than she could chew. Ashley and Hardin, her employer's children, were very difficult to deal with. She felt her patience run out, time and time again. Sometimes she would lose her cool and yell. When she got the job, she was excited to live in Switzerland for a year. She thought it would be like a paid vacation with little work.

Now she found herself being a mother way ahead of time, with children who were not even her own. She had to cook for them, ensure they ate, take them to school, pick them up from school and make sure they did their homework. She was also responsible for their safety and wellbeing.

Erin had never been so stressed in her life before. Ashley was three years old and Hardin was five. Both of them were rambunctious little kids. Her employers were both rather busy. Their mother was a high-powered business woman in the financial sector in Zurich and hence traveled most of the time. Their father was a writer and was often on book tours. That meant Erin was the person incharge. She could not afford to make a mistake.

Every night, as she put the kids to bed, she thanked god for keeping them safe yet another day. Though they were hard to deal with, she was slowly but steadily growing attached to them. Their sweet smiles melted her heart. Once in a while, she let them stay up late to watch television or gave them an extra piece of chocolate.

Erin also had to teach them French. Now, this was indeed a difficult task. She had lied that she knew French to get the job. She did not know much

French. She wished she had not lied. She spent several nights cramming French in her head so that she could teach the kids.

One day, Erin told Ashley, "Why don't we work on your French pronunciation today?"

Ashley proudly said, "*Oui madame* (yes madam)."

Erin began the lesson when Hardin snuck from behind and grabbed Ashley's pigtails. Ashley yelled, "Oui weeee oui weee."

Before Erin could grab Hardin, he ran away and hid quickly. Ashley broke into tears. Erin had to choose between comforting Ashley and giving Hardin a stern talk. It was not an easy choice.

Meal times were also trying. Hardin liked meat while Ashley refused to eat anything but cheese and chocolate. Both were not healthy food options for growing children.

Erin tried to convince them. "The two of you are growing up. If you want to be strong and healthy, you need to eat a balanced diet."

Hardin stuck his tongue out at Erin and did an imitation of a caveman, saying, "Meat good."

Ashley then said, "I think I should be allowed to eat what I like. I want to speak to my mommy. She would let me eat my cheese and chocolate."

Erin tried a different approach. She negotiated with them, offering them an extra half-hour in the park to play if they ate their vegetables.

While bargaining worked sometimes, at times she had to distract them with a movie or stories to make meal time more interesting.

As time went by, Erin became more patient. The three of them became good friends. Erin at times found it difficult to maintain her role as an adult. She did not like punishing the kids. She did not like sending them to their rooms to think about what they had done. However, she had no choice.

Every day, she followed the schedule and menu given to her by Ashley and Hardin's parents. She had to be punctual and complete her chores on time. She

had never been more organized in her life. A year passed and it was time for Erin to leave for the university. The new nanny was scheduled to arrive soon.

It was time for Erin to bid farewell to the kids. They hugged her tight and tried to convince her to stay.

Ashley batted her eyelashes and said, "I will share my chocolates with you if you stay."

Hardin tried his luck and said reluctantly, "I will make sure Ashley eats her vegetables always and I will eat mine once a week."

Ashley was aghast at the thought of this. She started fighting with Hardin, "Vegetables? I do not like those. You are mean!"

Hardin started pulling Ashley's pigtails. Ashley began crying. Hardin ran and hid quickly. Erin thought to herself, "Not again." She comforted Ashley and then went to find Hardin. She gave him a stern talk yet again.

Finally, it was time for Erin to take the train to the airport. She collected her final pay check and left. She would miss the children but at the same time she was relieved to be going back to living the life of an eighteen-year-old.

Erin was home soon. Her parents hugged her and told her that they had missed her. She had a few weeks at her parents' place before she left to Leiden to study at the university. Her parents noticed the changes in Erin. They could see that she was more organized and methodical. She seemed to have really become responsible over the last year. Her parents were pleased with these changes.

The day before she was leaving to the university,her dad said, "Erin, we are proud of you."

Erin was confused. She asked, "What do you mean?"

Her dad smiled, "We were worried that we are sending a child to Switzerland. Your mother and I also worried about how short-tempered you were and how you would adjust with a roommate in your dorm at the university. When you were growing up, you were a really difficult child to deal with. You refused to eat your food, cried and fussed over little things. As a

teenager, I must say we lost our patience with you several times. However, I am very pleased to see this young and patient girl standing before me."

Erin was taken aback by her father's candidness. She said, "Dad, over the last year I have come to realize that children can really try your patience. I have a newfound appreciation for mother and you. Kids have the power to make you lose your patience completely, especially if they are in trouble. I grew really close to Ashley and Hardin and I felt responsible for them. I would completely lose it if they were in trouble. At the same time, they increased my levels of endurance and patience. I can never be the same again."

Erin's father gave her a hug and said, "I am no longer worried. I believe this has been a great learning experience for you and you are a better person. I am sure you can tackle anything the university throws at you. Good luck!"

I relate this story to my life thus:

14
Let's not Find a Reason to Smile, let's Just Smile – DJ

Stuck in traffic on his way home, he stared at the stars in the sky. Admiring the dark beauty of the sky studded with diamonds, Roger felt relieved, relieved from all the pressures in life. It had been a hectic week in office. Not even a second had gone by, when he was disturbed by the honking car behind him. In a snap, he was back in reality.

A workaholic by nature, Roger was driven by the desire to prosper in life. He wanted to become the biggest and richest stockbroker in the world. So he started to chase his dream. At the age of twenty-four, he landed a job in one of the most renowned companies in the country. With hard-work and determination, Roger took the company to new heights.

At a young age of twenty-seven, Roger became the new face of the Indian stock market. As life went by, his satisfaction grew, but not his happiness. He was leading the life he had always imagined,in the midst of luxury and comfort. But as they say, it is always lonely at the top. Roger was beginning to feel lonely. He missed the good old carefree days when he could have a hearty laugh at someone's expense and no one seemed to mind. But now,the materialistic world with fierce competition had wiped the smile off his face. The smile that was once glued to his face had disappeared over the years. It seemed as though, on the way to success, Roger had lost the road to happiness.

Often Roger sat in his penthouse apartment with a glass of whisky in one hand and his college yearbook in the other. He reminisced the simple days when even the stupidest thing would bring a broad smile to his face. One could see a whole lifetime of happiness on his face.

Roger had always thought that luxury and comfort were essential for a happy and contented life. Having dedicated his whole life to work and career, Roger expected a life full of bliss. But he was living the contradictory life and he blamed himself for it.

"Was it so wrong to chase my passion and desire? Is it my fault that I am leading a lonely life?" questioned Roger, as he looked at the mirror expecting a reply.

The next day, he was stuck in traffic again on his way to work. A frustrated Roger sat with his hand on his head. Tired of this monotonous life, Roger wanted to break free. So instead of heading back to the office, he went back home. He opened his cupboard and took out his camera. Photography was a passion he had followed in his teens but he had given it up thinking it was more of a distraction than a hobby. Now, as realization dawned on him, it seemed to him that, chasing his dreams, he had forgotten to live. But not anymore.

A new Roger stood in front of the mirror and spoke to himself in a confident manner, "You, young man, have a beautiful life to live and you are going to live it to the fullest. Let happiness come to you. Don't chase it." He smiled at the mirror and headed out. He hit the road with Bryan Adams' 'Here I Am' playing in full volume.

Suddenly life seemed fresh. Roger felt as though he was breathing in a new body. The sun seemed so friendly, the trees seemed to sing a different tune and the people he photographed on the way seemed so full of life.

People in his office were actually surprised when Roger smiled at them when they wished him a good morning. It was a rare sight. Soon the news went viral in office. Roger's smile became contagious. Suddenly the mood in the office lifted, thanks to Roger's good mood.

Roger was busy editing his latest shots. Some of them were indeed splendid.

"So I still haven't lost my touch. Wonder why I wasted all these years," thought Roger.

Just then Alex walked in. He was a partner in the firm and a great admirer of Roger. He loved the fact that Roger was always serious about his work, but he had often told Roger to loosen up a bit and enjoy life.

"So, it seems you are in love. What else can bring color to your face? You look so radiant today. In fact, you didn't even look this happy the day we

sealed our best deal or the day our shares hit the roof. Come on, you've got to tell me," said Alex.

"Yes, you're right Alex. I'm in love. Rather, I got my love back. Here, look at these and you will find out all about my lady love."

Roger showed the pictures he had taken on the way to office.

"They are pretty good. In fact,they are amazing. Hey wait! Are you planning to switch professions? I'm doomed if you do. Please! For my sake, don't even think about it. Roger, hope you are not serious." Alex was genuinely worried.

"What do you think? Should I, shouldn't I?" asked Roger.

Roger wanted to scare Alex and observe his reaction. His old naughty self was back again – the same naughty streak that had troubled several people back then. Alex was not aware of Roger's fun side and was actually worried that Roger may be seriously considering a new profession. He knew Roger was capable of plunging into anything and reaching the top. Alex knew he was finished without him.

"Well! The pictures are good, but I don't know what's come over you. It is all right to shoot a few clicks here and there, but you can't walk out of a flourishing company just like that. I mean, that would be foolish."

Roger burst out laughing. He was so amused at Alex's reaction.

It had been such a long time since he had such a hearty laugh. He then realized that there needn't be a reason to smile. He just had to smile.

I relate this story to my life thus:

15
Life is Meaningless Without a Purpose – DJ

Paul had the perfect life. He was living the great American dream. He was a software engineer in the Silicon Valley working for one of the biggest companies in San Francisco. He had a lovely apartment and man's best friend, a Saint Bernard named Rudolf. Everything seemed perfect. He was well-paid, had nice things and good friends and lived in a scenic city, but he still felt something was missing.

One day, over a drink with his best friend Lauren, Paul said, "I feel there is a hole in my otherwise perfect life. Have you ever felt like that Lauren?"

Lauren said, "Sometimes I feel something is missing. But I don't know what that something is."

Paul felt a sense of reinforcement with Lauren's reply. He said, "I have everything that an ideal life is meant to have and yet I am not content. My list of wants keeps increasing and my desires are insatiable."

Lauren replied, "Well it's not that we lack comforts or we are in need of money. Have you read the book Eat Pray Love?"

Paul said, "No, but I have seen the movie starring Julia Roberts. Isn't it the movie where Julia Roberts thinks she has everything she wants in life: a home, a husband and a successful career? However,after divorce, facing a turning point in her life, she is confused about what is important to her. Daring to step out of her comfort zone, Julia embarks on a quest of self-discovery that takes her to Italy, India and Bali. That's the one, right?"

"Yes. But the book is better. I can lend it to you on Kindle. Perhaps that is what you need: a journey of self-discovery."

Paul was surprised and asked Lauren, "What about you? Don't you want such a journey?"

Lauren thought about it for a moment and said, "Like I said, sometimes I do feel that something is missing but I have many responsibilities and I cannot

put them aside even for a moment. I need to go through the rigors of life before I can find out life's true meaning."

Paul rumpled his nose as though he had smelt something bad and then said, "I think it is a bit of a cliché to follow the path of Eat Pray Love. I mean, what should I do? Should I abandon everything and go to a Third World country? I don't think it's possible for everyone to go on such a journey. After all, that was just a movie."

Lauren nodded her head in agreement and asked, "So what will you do?"

Paul said, "I really do not know."

That night, Paul could not sleep. He turned from side to side perturbed by the thought of filling the hole in his life. He pulled out his laptop and googled 'life's true meaning.'

He got all kinds of hits: stories of people volunteering in Third World countries, prophetic statements, religious outcry, movies and tarot card reader's addresses.

Paul considered Lauren's suggestion and then shook his head. He could not just abandon his life in San Francisco. After all, he was an American citizen with student loans to pay off. He thought hard.

He once again typed in Google: 'What is the purpose of life?'

Once again he got several hits. He was about to give up when he came across a blog titled 'Life is meaning less without a purpose.'

The blog mostly contained religious commandments urging people to feed the hungry, not to covet, not to steal, etc. Though Paul was not a religious man, he felt there was some truth in the blog's title. Paul felt he needed a purpose. Instead of floating through life, he felt he had to figure out the purpose of his life.

Having been brought up in a typical American household, which laid emphasis on material things, the idea of having a purpose in life had never struck him. He had been so preoccupied with studying, making money and amassing material things that he had not thought about the non-material aspects of life.

So Paul decided to try one new thing every day so that he could ascertain his purpose in life. He also decided to talk to as many people as possible to find out if they knew their purpose in life. This way, he thought he could continue to lead a near-perfect life and also take care of his obligations, while trying to fill the gaping hole in his life. Pleased with his idea, Paul tried to get some sleep before he got ready to be at work by 8.30 a.m.

The next day, Paul reached office as usual at 8.15 a.m. However, instead of merely greeting the doorman to his office building, he stopped and spent five minutes talking to him.

"So Hernando how are you this morning?"

Hernando, in an accented English, said, "Muy (very) muy (very) good. Thanks for asking."

Paul continued, "Are you happy?"

Hernando was taken aback. He began to worry that he was in trouble. "Sir, I do not know what you have heard but I like working here. It makes it possible to live the American dream."

Paul said, "Interesting. So you are happy then?"

Hernando replied proudly, "Indeed. It is all perfecto (perfect)."

Paul asked, "So you tell me something: do you think life is meaningless without a purpose?"

Hernando thought about it and said, "Certainly. I left Colombia as a refugee. My purpose is my survival and taking care of my family. I work towards that every day. I am trying to bring my whole family to America. It is safer here than in Colombia."

Paul was pleased with this discovery. He wished Hernando a good day before he went to his desk. He got into the usual routine of replying to emails and working on the tasks for the day.

During lunch break, Paul was browsing the internet for the news of the day and came across a news item on the refugee crisis in Europe. He thought about Hernando being a refugee in America. He wondered if there was anyway to use technology, which he was well versed in, to help with the refugee crisis.

Paul went about his regular life even as he tried to build on the idea of designing a software that could help speed up the process of registering asylum seekers and refugees fleeing persecution in Syria. He did not know much about the crisis or the refugee status determination procedure. Therefore, he decided to take some classes at the local community college on refugee law and armed conflict.

Meanwhile, Paul kept to his promise of trying new things. He tried a variety of things from deep sea diving, spelunking to volunteering at the local cancer clinic but nothing excited him as much as the classes at the community college.

The classes made him realize that he may not be able to help in the registration process as it was the prerogative of the government to determine who was a refugee. However, he came up with another idea for an application that served as a warning of violence.

He decided to run the idea by Hernando. The next day, he spoke to Hernando, "Do you think it would be useful and help protect the safety of civilians if people from an area posted about the violence that was taking place there? Will this serve as an early warning system? Like how we have warnings for earthquakes and hurricanes?"

Hernando replied, "Without a doubt. If there was shelling somewhere and if we could map out the route, then people can avoid those places."

Paul was excited that he had come up with a good idea. He hugged Hernando and said, "Thank you."

Paul started working on an application that would serve as an early warning system for civilians caught in situations of violence. This application would serve to keep people safe not only in armed conflicts in Syria but also from regular crime in big cities that were otherwise peaceful.

Paul had finally found a purpose to his life. He felt that his life was more fulfilling. He slept more peacefully. Paul continued to take care of his obligations even as he tried to contribute a solution to some of the problems of the world. He was doing it through the only way he knew – using technology.

He told Lauren, “Lauren, I do not believe that one has to leave his or her current life to go on a journey of self-discovery. I think you can live your regular life and try to enrich it. You can add meaning to your life by finding a purpose.”

He continued, “Lauren, if you are free to meet for a drink tomorrow evening, I would love to tell you about my journey to find the purpose of my life and give meaning to it.”

Lauren agreed to meet her friend. When she heard his story,she was thrilled.

I relate this story to my life thus:

16
Maturity is not About Understanding Others, it is About Understanding the Self – DJ

The sun was down and it was a beautiful spectacle.

Kavya was absorbed completely in nature's serene beauty, oblivious of the stress in her life. Nature always made her forget her tension and helped her stay calm and relaxed. She could sit for long hours in the balcony of her house on the eighth floor and watch the leaves glisten in the rain or feel the cool evening breeze soothe her soul. She sat in her balcony whenever she was upset or distressed. Today was one of those days when she needed to be alone and cool down after the morning's heated argument.

Kavya could feel it coming. They had been married for just six months but cracks had already started to appear. The cherished moments of togetherness slowly began to be replaced with disagreements and bitter quarrels.

Aditya had once again left the house without having his breakfast, which Kavya had prepared so painstakingly despite being late to work. Kavya stashed his food in the fridge and left the house without a word. She knew it was useless arguing with Aditya. She felt Aditya had changed. Or had she assessed him incorrectly earlier?

Aditya and Kavya were both software engineers employed in the same firm. Both of them had joined the firm around the same time. In fact, they had been working on the same project from the very beginning of their careers.

Their chemistry at work was fantastic and this reflected in the quality of the projects. Soon they became inseparable. Even their parents approved of their relationship. Kavya and Aditya spent considerable time together before they took their relationship to the next level. Their courtship lasted a year. When they were convinced that they were made for each other, they decided to tie the knot. The first few months were blissful. Everyone in their family was convinced that they were a good match. They seemed the perfect couple, understanding and mature.

Then the arguments began. Soon they became an everyday affair. Whenever they talked to each other, it ended in an argument. Sometimes, days went by without any major exchange of words between them.

Kavya was really upset that day. When her friend Annie saw her sulking, she knew things were not quite right between Kavya and Aditya.

Of late, Aditya hadn't been fun in office too. Annie could sense a fallout between the couple. They avoided being together in office—this was strange for most people at work. Annie knew she had to have a heart-to-heart chat with Kavya.

Kavya was initially hesitant to discuss her personal crisis with Annie. But when Annie insisted, she relented. She told her how Aditya was a changed man. She felt he no longer cared for her; maybe he was bored with the institution of marriage, which brought along with it commitment and the need for tolerance. Annie heard her out patiently. In the end, Annie gave Kavyaa suggestion. This brought some cheer to Kavya's long sullen face.

At night, Kavya, on Annie's suggestion, brought up the topic of a vacation with Aditya. Fortunately, Aditya agreed to it.

It occurred to Kavya that maybe Aditya too was looking to patch the strain in their relationship. That night, after a long time, they sat together surfing the internet, looking for holiday packages. They decided on Goa. Aditya thought a long relaxing weekend at the beach would do them more good than sightseeing in the hills. Kavya agreed though she was keen on Manali, where she had many childhood memories.

Packing for the vacation itself was fun. Aditya had never seen Kavya so happy in a long time. She was not nagging him anymore. He too was relaxed and looked forward to happier times. Kavya shopped a lot for the trip. She was so happy showing her shopping loot to her friends.

When they were checking into the hotel in Goa, a loud friendly pat on his back made Aditya turn around instantly. He was right. It was Kartik. He was standing there with Ashima, his wife, sporting a loud grin on his face.

"Aditya! It is great that you have come to Goa. We were kind of getting bored here."

"Wow! Great to run into you guys here! A foursome is better than a twosome," said Aditya, looking at Kavya. To his relief, she didn't seem to mind his joke.

"Guys, meet Kavya, my better half. Better because she thinks she is better than me at everything," joked Aditya.

Kartik laughed aloud. "Well, Kavya is not alone then. Ashima can give her some tips on this. She is a master of all traits, while I am a jack of none, in her words."

The two women laughed.

Soon they freshened up after keeping their luggage in their rooms. Kartik and Ashima became their unofficial guides as this was their second visit to the city.

Kavya was not sure whether they should go sightseeing together as this could mess up their holiday plans, as well as Kartik and Ashima's. When she voiced her concern with Aditya, he brushed it aside and said, "Wait till you actually get to know them. They are a great pair."

Kavya left it at that. She always tried to adjust with Aditya that she often ended up changing her perspective or controlling her desire. Aditya knew she wanted to spend some time alone with him but Kavya didn't bring it up.

The next two days,they had a lot of fun at the beach. At night, when it was time for the couples to be alone, both Kartik and Aditya kept drinking till late in the night, leaving both Kavya and Ashima furious.

Kavya felt that the holiday was doing them no good. When she brought up the matter with Aditya the next day, he told her to relax. "Chill! We are on a holiday, remember?"

"Yes I do know that we are on a holiday. But do you remember the last time we actually spoke to each other? Do we have nothing more to share between us? Or are you bored of me, in simple words?"

Kavya started to cry. Aditya put his arms around her warmly.

"I have been waiting for this for so long now. Have you looked at yourself lately, Kavya? I mean not physically, but you don't seem to be the person I fell in love with. You have forgotten how to speak for yourself completely. Why did you have to change for me, Kavya? Why? Marriage doesn't need to change you as a person. I agree that you have to make compromises, but that shouldn't make you a weak person. Marriage should give you strength, the strength of love. You have lost your personality trying to please me. This is unacceptable to me. I had to actually set this up to take you to the edge. Maturity is not about understanding others. It is actually about understanding your own self and what you want from life. Once you are clear about this, the problems can take care of themselves. It is that simple."

Kavya was smiling through her tears now. She always knew her choice could never be wrong. Today she had been proven right. She hugged Aditya tight.

I relate this story to my life thus:

17
Meditation Enhances your Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening Skills – DJ

A meditative pursuit:

Claudia was having a bad day at the university.

No, it wasn't just one of those days when everything seemed to go wrong. Claudia had an uncanny feeling that there was something terribly wrong with her.

In the past few months, Claudia's concentration had gone awry. She simply couldn't focus on the lectures or be an active participant in the discussions in class. Her grades were slowly slipping due to lack of interest and attentiveness. She was struggling with the names of acquaintances. Her mind could not connect familiar faces with their names.

Her self-confidence hit a new low today when she was asked a question with an obvious answer. But in spite of trying very hard, she simply couldn't put two and two together.

Claudia felt she had to visit her therapist. But she felt awkward going to him for the simple reason that she couldn't describe her sluggish behavior to anyone in straight words. Considering how much Dr Edward prodded his patients, she dropped the idea. She thought perhaps the change in weather contributed to her recent slothful behavior.

Claudia decided to cheer herself by hanging out with her friends. One call and they were there for her. She felt really thankful for having such lovely friends. Roger and Cynthia had been her best pals since high school. They often did awesome and stupid things together.

The three of them agreed to watch a movie at Claudia's place. They relaxed on the couch with cola cans and popcorn. They flipped a coin to pick the movie. Roger won the toss and the girls sighed. They knew they had to gear up

for two hours of gruesome action or horror. Roger always chose hard-core action movies. They were partially right this time. He decided on *Karate Kid*.

It wasn't the first time they were watching the movie, but the girls agreed to it as it was better than his other choices. Claudia had seen the movie twice and liked it a lot.

Roger had a definite purpose behind choosing this movie. He was worried about Claudia and how disintegrated she seemed of late. Through the course of the movie, he wanted to steer the conversation to Claudia and her lethargy.

During the movie, Roger told the girls about the power of meditation and how it could change people inside-out. He told them about how ancient saints and gurus in Asia used their meditative powers to cure many illnesses and attain enlightenment. Many Hindus, Buddhists and Jains practiced meditation not only as a religious compulsion but also as a preferred guide to healthy holistic living, he said.

"I have friends in India who do yoga for fitness. I've heard it is a wondrous workout that purifies both the mind and the soul. Do not undermine its importance, folks. We have an international day dedicated to yoga now. I desperately want to visit India once and learn awesome meditation techniques straight from the yoga gurus," said Roger.

This set Claudia thinking. "Is meditation the answer to all my problems? Can meditation put my mind to rest and help me get in control? Can I actually overcome my hesitation to speak?"

Then she said aloud, "Folks! I really need this. Maybe I can set my mind right. Please find out where I can learn yoga. Do I need to go up the mountains and spend a lifetime there to fix my life?"

"Cool it. You don't have to go anywhere. Miss Know-all is at your service," said Cynthia.

"Cynthia! How do you know about meditation?"

"I know of a cool site that offers wonderful courses in meditation. It talks about how our overtly stressful lives create havoc on our body and mind and how meditation helps us soothe our minds and relax internally. When our

mind is calm, it works better and faster, thus giving us more time on hand. It teaches us how to transform our negative thoughts into positive ones and alter the status of mind from a disturbed state to a peaceful one. The site teaches you awesome breathing techniques, which help us overcome stress and attain peace by finding our inner balance."

"Awesome Cynthia! You sound like a yoga guru yourself. When did you learn all this?" asked Roger.

"It has been six months and I feel lighter already. If I give twenty minutes to my mind and soul, I get back so much more. It's really worth the time and effort. You have to try it to believe it. It's quite an experience, a kind of a rebirth."

"Done! I'm into it. When can I start?" asked Roger.

"We will start together, with Cynthia as our guide," said Claudia.

Soon Claudia and Roger began their meditation classes and were introduced to a whole new world. Claudia felt her mind relax in the first session itself. Within twenty minutes, she felt renewed vigor and freshness that even a night's sleep couldn't bring.

Roger was astounded with the calmness it brought to his noisy mind, which was forever flooded with destructive thoughts. Though he couldn't suppress his laughter during the first few minutes,when the instructor was chanting *shlokas*, Roger soon found peace within.

The first experience was good enough for them to continue their pursuit of meditation. Days turned into weeks and weeks into months. Four months down the line, Claudia was back to her own self. Forgetfulness, inattentiveness and distractions were problems of the past. Soon, she was her sharp and witty self and loved to indulge in heated discussions on various topics. This was her rebirth.

Claudia recommended meditation and yoga to anyone and everyone she met.

I relate this story to my life thus:

18
Most of Us are Busy Making Money, Very Few are Building Relationships – DJ

"Money, money, money, it's a rich man's world," goes the song by Abba.

Money has definitely become the main focus in life. Increasingly, the world seems to revolve around it.

Then there is the MasterCard advertisement that says, "Money can't buy everything. For everything else, there is MasterCard."

But what is MasterCard? A credit card, for which you require money again.

Thomas was fed up. He did not think like everyone else. He did not want to spend his life in the pursuit of money. He was an American citizen living in India. He had completed law school but he had no desire to practice law or join a law firm or a company like his fellow batch-mates.

It was the month of April. He decided to travel across India, relying on people's kindness and hospitality to help him get around. He gave up his mobile phone and put away all his bank cards. He purchased a flight ticket from Delhi to New York. He decided to meet his parents for Christmas in December, to mark the end of his journey.

Thomas lived in Pune. He started his journey on foot. He carried absolutely nothing with him. His first few days were extremely hard. The only food and water he got was from religious establishments. The people he met thought he had lost his mind.

In the third week of his journey, he ran into Gautham, a social anthropologist. Gautham found Thomas' experiment very interesting. He wanted to know more about what Thomas hoped to achieve.

Gautham asked Thomas, "Would you like to come with us to Mumbai? We are driving there. I would love to hear more about this experiment. I would also be happy to treat you to lunch in exchange for your company."

Thomas said, "Sure. That is very kind of you."

Gautham, his wife Prema, and Thomas got into Gautham's red Alto car. They drove towards Mumbai. On the way, they stopped at a restaurant to have lunch.

Prema asked Thomas, "What do you for a bath?"

Thomas, who was looking quiet scruffy, said, "Well, I have not thought this through." He laughed and said, "Perhaps I should have planned better but I wanted to see what would happen on this journey."

Gautham asked, "How old are you?"

Thomas replied, "Twenty-two years. When I arrive in Delhi to catch my flight home, hopefully in time for Christmas, I will be twenty-three years old."

Gautham was curious, "Boys your age are more geared towards having a good life. Why have you chosen to do this?"

Thomas thought a little and said, "I did not like the idea of running behind money. I want to understand how human relations work. I hope to learn a lot from this journey. Do you think we could order food? I am hungry."

Prema said, "Of course."

They ordered food.

Thomas had never tasted food so delicious. He felt as though he had not eaten forages. The *dal* was hot and spicy, the rice was cooked well and the salad was like a melody in his mouth. After lunch, the three of them got back into the car and drove towards Mumbai.

Thomas curled up and slept in the backseat.

When they reached Mumbai, Prema said, "Thomas, why don't you take a shower and rest at our place?"

Thomas said, "I am actually well-rested, thanks to the back seat of your car. But I would love to take a shower and continue on my journey, if you do not mind."

So they proceeded to the couple's apartment. Thomas took a shower. He felt as though he was washing off years of filth, as he looked at himself in the mirror. It had been a week since he had been in a bathroom with modern

plumbing and drainage. He appreciated it so much more. The ease of a shower, a clean toilet and a good drainage system was such a boon.

When he was done, Thomas thanked the couple, "You have been very kind. I am extremely grateful."

Gautham handed some money to Thomas and said, "Here." Thomas refused it and said, "No. No. I cannot take money or my experiment will be pointless."

Prema insisted on giving him some food. He agreed to that. She packed him a simple meal of *roti* with sugar as nothing else would last very long. Gautham wrote down his number and email and said, "I would love to hear about your journey, whenever you can inform me about it."

Thomas took the piece of paper and said, "Certainly."

Thomas headed towards the bus station as the couple had suggested. He followed their directions. It was easy to find the place. Once he got to the bus station, he was not too sure what to do. So he sat on a bench. A few hungry children eyed his bag of food. He smiled and waved to them. He generously gave them all the food.

One of the children's mother came running and yelled at her daughter, "Stop troubling the kind man. Can you not see how thin he is? And you are taking food from him!"

Thomas said, "Oh, do not worry. I am sure I will find something."

The woman said, "No, sir. Children have to learn that they cannot have everything. They should live within their limits."

Thomas found this statement interesting. "Usually parents tell their children that they can have anything they want and encourage them to go after money."

The woman said, "Sir, we are poor. Our dreams are limited. The best thing is we have each other. We can manage the rest. Where are you going?"

Thomas told her about his experiment. She said, "I have nothing to offer you. But my husband is a bus driver and he will be heading to Gujarat. If you are interested, you can work as a conductor on the bus. I can convince him to take you along."

Thomas readily agreed. He was soon on the bus to Gujarat, donning the role of a conductor. He thoroughly enjoyed his journey. He chatted with the passengers and shared his journey and his mission with them. Some of them made fun of him. Some advised him against his pursuit. But they were all intrigued about his experiment. Some of them offered him food.

Thomas reached Gujarat. One of the passengers on the bus was a writer. He had written on Gujarat and its development in the last decade. He offered to take Thomas around Gujarat free of cost to help him understand the socio-political scenario of the state. Thomas accepted his offer as he felt it would be interesting.

Thomas spent the next three weeks with the writer. He saw that Gujarat was unlike what he had read. No doubt the infrastructure,such as the highways and roadways,was brilliant but the small villages did not have even the basic amenities. He learnt a little bit of Gujarati and tried to communicate with the locals. He lived in villages and ate the food offered by the villagers.

He was amazed at the hospitality of the people. They had so little and yet were kind enough to share whatever they had with a stranger. When he returned to Gandhi nagar to the writer's apartment, he felt as though he was in a heavenly castle.

During his travel in the state, he came across the Institute of Rural Management. He decided to a master's degree here.

Thomas was increasingly realizing the importance of human relations. Building ties and relationships gave him a sense of being a part of something larger. He felt that he was not lonely, even though he was traveling on his own.

The next morning, he headed to the shore temple. There he joined a group of traveling volunteers from a college program. They were heading to Rajasthan and offered him a ride. Thomas continued his journey.

Thomas was excited about the experiences he would have in Rajasthan. It was only five weeks since he began his journey. He had a long way to go before December. He had no doubt that he would successfully complete his mission to understand and build relationships, without a rupee in his pocket.

I relate this story to my life thus:

19
Work with a Purpose in Life, even if One Life is Not Enough to Fulfill It – DJ

Angelica read the *Huffington* Post in Australia. She scanned the news from India. She read horrifying stories of the treatment of women in the country. It affected her in more ways than she could fathom. She was an Indian by origin but was now an Australian citizen.

She was studying gender studies in Australia and felt that India would be the ideal place for her to spend a semester on research. She spoke to her supervisor in college about it.

She said, "Sir, I want to spend one semester in India researching for my paper."

Her professor said, "I am not sure if this is safe. I have been reading some really scary articles on India. However, if your parents agree and you manage to get funds for your research, then I will take up your idea with the dean."

Angelica spoke to her mother who was an Australian. "Mom, I want to go to India to do research for my thesis on gender studies."

Her mother asked, "Are you sure this is not a ploy to meet your father?"

Angelica laughed and said, "Come on, mom. You know we do not lie to each other. Although having dad in India will definitely make the logistics easier."

Her mother said, "I am not sure this is safe. Why have you chosen India?"

Angelica said, "Well, I read about how children, who are two and five years old, are being gang-raped. I also read that in Delhi there are six cases of rape and fourteen cases of molestation reported every day. These are only the reported cases, mom. Can you imagine how many cases go unreported? I want to understand why there is such a large problem in India. I also feel connected to this subject because I am an Indian. It will give me a chance to understand my roots."

Her mother, who was modern and progressive, said, "I will talk to your father."

Angelica's mother and father had separated due to differences when Angelica was eight years old. However, they maintained a cordial relationship due to their daughter.

Her mother called her father the next day, "Hello. It is me, Rachel. How are you Hiren?"

Hiren said, "I am well. Is Angelica fine?"

Rachel replied, "Our daughter is fine. She actually wanted to visit you. It would be more than a visit. She wants to do her research on India for her thesis on gender studies. Would you be willing to host her?"

Hiren was thrilled, "Willing? I would be delighted. How long does she want to come here for and when?"

Rachel said, "I will work out the details and inform you. But please do not involve her in your activism. Let her stick to her academic pursuits."

Hiren said, "Just send her. I will take care of her."

One of the reasons why Angelica's parents had separated was Hiren's deep ties with his country and his reluctance to stay in Australia. This had caused a strain on their marital life. Hiren was an environmental activist and his activism often landed him in trouble and prison. Rachel had often felt lonely and abandoned.

Rachel and Angelica made the travel plans and also tied up with a college in Pune where she could take classes on gender studies and spend a semester. Angelica was excited to go to Fergusson College. Fortunately, she spoke some Hindi.

When she arrived in Pune, her father came to pick her up. Hiren hugged his daughter and said, "I am so glad to see you."

They got into an auto-rickshaw. Hiren spoke to the auto driver in Marathi. Angelica looked confused. She asked, "What language are you speaking?"

Hiren replied, "Marathi."

"Don't they speak Hindi?"

"Not a lot here."

Angelica sighed, "So my Hindi is useless. I have so much to learn about India."

Angelica had one week before her classes started. She spent time adjusting to the time lag and learning her way around Pune. She also picked up some basic Marathi phrases to get by. She looked Indian and therefore did not face as much harassment as a foreigner would.

Angelica had to learn to adjust to the culture in India. She realized that she could not dress the way she wanted. In Australia, nobody stared at her but in India her clothes seemed to attract a lot of attention.

She enjoyed her classes a lot and made many friends. She began to volunteer at the women's cell and also took Marathi classes in her free time.

Her father's work intrigued her. One day, Angelica asked him if she could go to a rally with him. He agreed to take her if she had her mother's approval.

Angelica called her mother on Skype, "Mom, as part of my studies and understanding of India, I want to go to a rally with dad."

Her mother sighed and tried to dissuade her daughter but it was of no use. She finally agreed when Angelica promised to stay safe.

Angelica wore the Indian clothes that she had bought. She accompanied her father to a meeting before the rally. There she was greeted with warmth by her father's colleagues. They gave her delicious tea and snacks. Angelica loved the hospitality in India. She also loved the milky *chai* and the tasty *pakoras*.

They handed her some flyers to distribute at the rally. Angelica walked along with her father. She noticed that both men and women had equal roles to play in the rally. This was the first time since she had come to India that Angelica did not feel out of place.

Angelica felt comfortable among the activists and really enjoyed the rally. She felt as though she was part of something big.

At night, she asked her father, "Are there similar groups working on women's rights?"

Her father said, "Of course. Would you like me to put you in touch with them?"

Angelica said, "Although I know this will make mom angry, I think it will be good for my research."

Hiren introduced Angelica to an organization in Pune that worked on gender equality. It worked on campaigns to end discrimination against women.

Angelica was nervous at first, but as she began attending meetings of the organization, she was amazed at the strength of not only the women but also the men. She soon became a regular at the meetings of the organization.

One of her colleagues said to her, "Have you seen this new show called 'Man's World'? It is based on the idea of women treating men the way men treat women."

Angelica downloaded the show on her laptop and watched it that night. It was a light-hearted show with a powerful message. It brought tears to her eyes.

After a few days, Angelica decided to apply for an internship in Delhi.

She sent an application and it was accepted. She was excited. It took a great deal of effort to convince not only her mother but also her father that she would be safe in Delhi.

Angelica got in touch with her university and persuaded her professor to let her spend another semester in Delhi. She completed her semester in Pune and left to Delhi.

Angelica decided that she would spend more time in India working towards the cause of equality and non-discrimination. She was not sure how to convince her family, but she knew that she had found her purpose in life and could not give it up.

She wanted to devote her career and life to the cause of gender justice in India. She understood that this meant giving up the comforts of Australia and enduring a harsh life in India. She would also have to deal with gender discrimination being a woman.

But she knew this was her life's goal and she had to pursue it, no matter how long it took. She knew she would not be able to change the mind-set of people in India in her lifetime, as the discrimination in society was deep rooted, but she had to work towards it.

The work ahead was not going to be an easy task. But she felt blessed to have found her purpose so early in life. Some people drift through life without any purpose. The ones who find their purpose and work towards it are destined for greatness.

Angelica had taken on a Herculean task but she would stick to it even if one lifetime was not enough.

I relate this story to my life thus:

20
No one Truly Wins until Everyone Wins – DJ

Mr Tenzing was the students' favourite teacher in Academic Heights College. He made the subject of sociology fun. Whenever he saw dull and bored faces, he stopped his lecture and took the class out for a basketball match or a jam session. Sometimes, he played songs on his guitar, which he always had with him. No student ever bunked his class.

That day, he was in the mood for a story session. He narrated a story about a small farmer who was very successful.

The corn the farmer grew was of excellent quality. He had won several awards for it. Once a journalist came to know that the farmer shared his corn seeds with his neighbors. He was stupefied.

"How can you do this knowing so well that they could compete against you in the corn competition every year?" asked the puzzled reporter.

"Simple theory, sir! Haven't you heard about cross-pollination? When the wind picks up pollen from the neighboring fields, I do not have to worry about my corn being cross-pollinated with inferior quality corn. I now know for sure that even nature shall help me in my efforts. Unless I help my neighbors, it becomes very difficult for me to reap a good harvest."

The reporter was amazed with the farmer's vision and foresight.

"So class, what do we learn from the story here? Any thoughts?" asked Mr Tenzing.

No one stood up. The story was nice, but no one volunteered to answer. Mr Tenzing gave the students time to think. When the students realized that Mr Tenzing wouldn't give away the answer, they started sharing their perspectives.

One of the girls spoke about the need for togetherness and cooperation. Soumya said the story taught them the golden rule of success. Tenzing was impressed. He urged them to think a bit more. Shoumik joked and said they learnt how to grow good quality corn. The whole class burst into laughter along with Mr Tenzing.

Finally, when Tenzing was sure he had brainstormed them enough, he elucidated the moral of the story. He was quite happy that some of the students had actually come quite close to it. He told the students how important it was to live in a symbiotic world.

"Anyone who wants to lead a meaningful life must enrich the lives of others because the value of one's life is measured by the lives it touches. If we choose to be happy, we must work towards helping others find happiness too. The wellbeing of every person is associated with the welfare of all.

"The story teaches us about the power of collective living. The fact is no man is an island unto himself. We all need each other for material or emotional reasons to achieve something. Unless we learn to take our community along with us, our progress is incomplete or short-lived. An industry prospers only when people have the power to buy the products it produces.

"None of us truly wins until we all win. We all need to shed our garb of selfishness. Our true test is how we function in this world as facilitators of accomplishment."

The class was again impressed by Mr Tenzing's explanation of a difficult subject.

I relate this story to my life thus:

21
Read the Expression Behind every Word uttered by Others – DJ

Cindy Thomson was crossing the street when someone bumped into her really hard. Her shopping bags fell on the street. Whatever she had shopped for over two hours, after carefully assessing what would suit her teenage daughter, was lying exposed on the street,under the prying eyes of passers-by.

Cindy was annoyed but her sweet temperament did not allow her to express her irritation. The person who had collided into her bent down to help her pick up the things from the pavement. She was apologizing sincerely. Cindy looked up to see the lady who had caused so much commotion. She didn't seem to be in a tearing hurry that would lead her to bump into people on her way. She was a fat, brown-haired lady. She appeared old, not so much with age but more with worry and grief. She seemed so lost that even when she apologized, she didn't seem to be present there mentally.

"Huh! You okay?" asked Cindy,

"Yeah, I'm fine. I mean, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. I just bumped. Hope I didn't hurt you."

Cindy smiled and said, "It's okay. We all do it sometime or the other. But are you sure you are okay? You seem worried and tensed. Is everything good?"

"No. I mean, yes. Everything's okay. I was just thinking about something."

Cindy smiled again, this time warmly. She was genuinely concerned about the lady who seemed so aggrieved.

"Anything I can do to help you?"

"No one can help me. Not you, not even me! No one helps anyone. If only people did, he would have been here."

The woman sounded vague and disturbed. There was something in her voice that made Cindy want to know more about the woman and her loss.

"Are you missing someone? You can talk to me. Often, sharing sorrow helps heal the wound. Why don't we sit in the café and talk?"

Cindy took the old woman by her arm and led her inside. She ordered hot cappuccino for the two of them. Under the warmth displayed by a stranger, the old woman broke down.

"My son, my only son who is twenty-two years old left me all alone in this big unknown city. He died ten days ago in a road accident. Someone ran him down and didn't bother to even stop and take him to the hospital. By the time the accident was reported and an ambulance took him to the nearby hospital, he had lost a lot of blood and couldn't be saved. People here are so heartless. No one cares. If only someone had bothered to help, my David would have been alive today, right here next to me. He was such an angel, always helping others."

Just then Cindy's phone rang. Cindy excused herself as she really had to take that call. It was Rebecca, her daughter.

"Mom, where are you? I have been waiting here for an hour. Did you forget that you had to pick me up?"

"No, Rebecca darling. I'm so sorry. I am stuck in an emergency. It will take me a bit longer here. Why don't you do one thing? You go home with Dan. I'm so sorry. Bye, take care," said Cindy and hung up. She hurried back to her seat. But the woman had disappeared. She looked around for her but she was nowhere in sight.

Cindy felt a deep sense of guilt. She shouldn't have left her alone and unaccompanied. The woman seemed terribly hurt and lonely.

Cindy asked a few people around if they had seen an old woman. Following their directions, she ran towards the street the woman may have gone. A little ahead, she found her. There she was—walking aimlessly on the pavement, bumping into people just like she had bumped into her an hour ago.

But surprisingly no one even bothered about her. She was walking on the pavement like a robot. Perhaps this is what she meant when she said people were heartless. They didn't even bother to give her a second look or a second thought. But Cindy's heart went out to her. She felt it was her duty to ensure that she reached her place safe and sound. Instead of walking up to her, she

decided to follow the woman at a safe distance to ensure she reached home safe.

The lady's zombie-like walk continued. Soon she was on the main street in the middle of heavy traffic. Cindy sensed something terribly unfortunate was about to happen. Just then a speeding lorry approached the woman. Cindy flung herself right in the middle of the road at lightning speed, pushing the old woman out of the lorry's way. The lorry driver saw this and swerved his vehicle to the left. He applied the brakes hard as the lorry came to a screeching halt.

"Wow, I made it. Thank god! And thank you," Cindy said, waving to the lorry driver.

Cindy leapta head to lift the woman who was lying unconscious on the road. She shook her and splashed some water on her face. Soon the woman opened her eyes. Cindy took her home as she felt the woman needed a lot of comfort and care to overcome her grief. The woman had yet not recovered from her state of shock. Cindy tucked her in bed and gave her some warm soup to drink. She then made her sit up to talk to her. Cindy felt that the woman would return to her normal state only if she shared her grief with someone.

Cindy implored her to talk about the town from where she was and her children. Slowly, the woman got talking. Her feelings started to pour. She shared with Cindy her good and bad memories. Her son was the only person she had in her life. He had come to the city for a better job. And when he found a good job, he had called his mother over to live with him. The old woman had come just that day to the city when she received a call from the hospital that her son was no more. He had been run over by a speeding car. She wanted to die too.

Cindy comforted her. She talked to her for hours. Then the conversation became less intense and more casual. The old woman relaxed a bit. She even smiled at one of Cindy's little jokes.

Cindy had averted a major mishap by reading between the lines. She used her ability to interpret people's expressions and hear their unsaid words. This is a power possessed only by human beings with a heart and a deep insight into human behavior. The two women went on to become great friends.

I relate this story to my life thus:

22

Real Power is not Physical Strength, it is Honoring your Word – DJ

The whole campus was bubbling with excitement. The preparations had begun and it seemed as though a gender war would break out any moment. Banners, posters and loud music lifted the spirits of even the indifferent ones. The girls had gone a step ahead and come up with their own anthem. They were singing it aloud in chorus. The boys laughed and assumed they could never lose.

The annual debate competition in Somerville High School always had this kind of effect on the students. It was a prestigious event and the top prize was a vacation at the city's best resort for a week. It was a do-or-die situation for the participants.

This year's topic had created an invisible divide between the girls and the boys, making it a battle of the sexes. The topic was: Who suffers the most when it comes to discrimination—boys or girls?'

Mark, David, Ed, Patrick and George were the best debaters from the boys' team. The boys felt this was the time to pour their hearts out. On the other hand, the girls—Emma, Suzanne, Lorraine, Beth and Miranda—fastened their belts and wanted to make sure they were heard properly this time.

The speeches were being rehearsed thoroughly every day. Soon it was time for the grand event, around which life in Somerville High School had revolved for the last one month. The cheer leader groups were also ready for the verbal brawl. The college campus was vibrant and full of life.

Mark and Lorraine were the hot favorites. They were the best orators in the school and incidentally they were best pals too. Mark was very good in academics and was also an excellent volleyball player. He was the captain of the boys' volleyball team. Lorraine too was on the women's volleyball team but she was quite new to the game. The evening before the debate competition, both the girls' and the boys' teams were practicing in the ground.

"Hey Lorraine! Game for a match?" asked Mark.

"Are you crazy, Mark? These girls don't stand a chance against us," snorted George.

"Winning is not everything, George. When we play together, we get to know the opponent's strengths and weaknesses. No harm in that," said Mark.

Lorraine was exhausted. But she couldn't say 'no' to the game. Lorraine was no quitter. And Mark knew that.

The girls' gang was slowly leaving. So Lorraine quickly caught hold of Emma. Soon the four of them were hitting the ball on the court. The girls lost 15-2.

George laughed while Mark clapped and said, "Well played,girls! The two points that you scored were damn good. Keep playing and soon you will bring laurels to the girls' team."

Lorraine smiled. She knew Mark well. He was such a positive person. He always honored his commitments. His words were always encouraging. In fact, whenever she needed any kind of moral support, she always turned to Mark.

But George was a staunch sexist. He felt that girls always had it easy because of their gender, while boys had to slog to achieve anything.

"Don't worry, George. We will get even tomorrow when we beat you hands down in the battle of words. It's an open challenge. We are going to give you a tough time tomorrow," said Lorraine.

"Hah! As though defeating us would be that easy! Lorraine, mind it! Tomorrow you shall lose more badly than you did today. Girls, girls! Be it physical might or mind power, we boys are definitely the leaders. You will need all the sympathy you can get, when you cry after your defeat."

"We shall see, George Mayer! It's only a matter of a few hours. And in the round that follows the debate, you better beware! I shall bombard you with questions that your dumb mind will never be able to comprehend."

"Guys, guys! Take it easy. It's only a debate. May the best speaker win," said Mark.

"Sure, the best speaker shall win," said Lorraine and walked off.

The next morning,as expected, there was a record turnout of students in the debate hall of Somerville High. The participants were anxious to turn the heat on. Soon the action began.

Ed was the first one on the dais. He spoke confidently but towards the end he forgot to link his ideas with the central theme. He was mauled by the opponent team. The girls smiled as they scored a brownie point.

The next one was Emma who spoke with confidence and conviction. The judges too exchanged approving glances with each other when she finished to a thundering applause.

The next few speakers from both sides were also good and it could be anyone's game.

It was soon George versus Lorraine.

George was the first to speak. He got on the dais to be welcomed by the booing of girls. This unnerved him completely. He waited for the din to die down but the entire student clan was out there, shouting slogans against him. All the girls knew what a sexist he was. He began his speech but the public pressure intimidated him. He faltered right from the beginning. He picked up tempo in the middle but was unable to finish his speech. He left the stage rattled.

Lorraine was elated. She didn't think George would chicken out like that on stage. She too got the same treatment that George was given, as the boys had to get even. But Lorraine was a seasoned speaker. She used the commotion to her advantage. She thanked them all for cheering her wholeheartedly and began her speech. She was flawless and perfect. She used just the right words and voice modulation, leaving the audience enraptured.

Mark too spoke well but his arguments were not supported by strong facts and figures like Lorraine's speech. The debate drew to a close and it was time for the results.

The team of girls had everything going in their favor and had no negative marks. So it was no great surprise when they were declared the winners. As

expected, Lorraine was adjudged the best speaker. The girls had won the competition by a clear margin and George was now here to be seen.

Mark walked up to Lorraine to congratulate her. He said, "Real power does not lie in physical strength, real power lies in honoring your commitment and word and you did just that. Congrats! By the way, George seems to have gone into hiding!"

They both laughed loudly.

I relate this story to my life thus:

23

Shouting gets You Nowhere. When you Yell, no one can Understand your point of view, no Matter how Much Time You Spend on It – DJ

It is no great secret that shouting does not help. We are all aware that discussing things with a calm mind is more beneficial than mere yelling.

However, when situations get tough, we tend to lose our temper. We get so caught up in a situation and yell, till we no longer know what we are yelling about. We often tend to shout at our children and our loved ones. Sometimes, yelling has a domino effect. For instance, the husband yells at his wife, she in turn yells at her child. Or the boss gets a firing from a member of the management and he passes this on to his employee and the employee in turn takes it out on a stranger on the road.

We often hear the phrase, "He is probably having a bad day and hence is in a bad mood."

Or

"He must have had a fight at home and now is taking it out on people in office."

Shouting has different kinds of impact but undoubtedly none of them are positive. In fact, it only has a detrimental effect. The person you shout at understands very little of what you say. This leads to wastage of time and there are no gains at all.

Alex sat at the mandatory leadership development seminar. He realized the above truth during the seminar and decided to reform himself: no matter how angry he got,he decided not to shout.

But it was not going to be easy as life always tests your patience to see how much fortitude you have.

The next morning, he woke up to his alarm and quickly got dressed. He was a single man and had to do everything by himself. The maid had not yet come

and hence there was no breakfast. He called her on her mobile phone and asked her, "Where are you?"

Maid replied, "Sir, I am sick and cannot come."

This was the fourth time that month his maid was giving him this excuse. Alex knew that she was lying. He could feel his temper rising. But he had promised himself not to shout. So he said, "Okay. Take care. Call me when you are better. Since you have been falling ill so often, perhaps it is better that you take some rest. In the meantime, I will look for someone else. Get well soon."

Within half an hour, the maid was at his house. She apologized to Alex and explained that she was finding it difficult to come early in the morning as she had to drop her child to school. Alex said he was willing to pay for her child's school bus if she agreed to come on time. She happily agreed. She quickly packed him lunch and breakfast. She even made a sweet out of gratitude.

Alex was pleased at the outcome of events. He went to work smiling, instead of fuming after a fight with the maid.

But as luck would have it, Alex was having a difficult time getting a taxi to work. He finally managed to get one but the taxi driver wanted twice the fare. Once again, Alex felt his anger rising. He took a deep breath and refused to get into the cab. Just then, it started raining. He quickly ran to the nearby bus stop to take refuge. He was getting more and more frustrated. If he did not get transport soon, he would be late for work.

Alex saw the metro rail nearby. He decided to use public transport. The metro was packed, but it kept him dry and got him to work on time, at an economical fare. Alex decided that this was a better option than haggling with taxi drivers every day. He was not happy about traveling in a crowded train, but he was not angry either.

When he reached office, he realized he was one of the first ones there. Only Sheela was sitting at the reception. She asked him, "Did you take the metro today?"

He asked, "How did you know?"

She replied, "Because you are dry and not stuck in traffic. Most of our colleagues are stuck in traffic. I always take the metro. The trick is to leave five minutes before rush-hour; that way you can get to office early and comfortably."

Alex thanked Sheela for her advice and thought he would use the metro from then on. He realized that not losing his temper definitely had a positive impact. He went to his cabin. Since his junior employees were late, he had to get going with the deliverables for the day.

There was plenty to do. Normally, when his employees came in late, Alex would give them a stern warning.

Today he used a different approach. He said, "I know you are late due to the rain. However, we still have deadlines to meet. I am not going to spend time yelling. I would suggest that each of you choose the tasks you feel you can complete according to the deadline. Let us focus on that rather than the fact that you are late and you have lost valuable time."

His employees were grateful for this approach. It increased their productivity that day. Most of them met the deadlines well before time. Since Alex seemed to be in a good mood, none of the employees were scared to come to him for clarifications or help.

Alex was pleased at the end of the day. He called his team and appreciated their efforts. He suggested that, in order to avoid traffic, some of them could use public transport. One of the women said, "Sir, why don't we start a car pool or a bus service? We would be willing to contribute towards that. It would help us travel to work conveniently and be on time to office."

Alex thought this was a brilliant suggestion. He said, "Why has no one suggested this before?"

One of his employees replied, "Sir, usually you are in a bad mood and difficult to approach. However, today you seem calm."

Alex smiled. He promised to look into the transport issue soon. He went home to find the maid waiting for him. She asked him if he had liked the sweet. Alex thanked her for it.

The maid cooked him a nice dinner. Alex went to bed happy and decided not to shout the next day. He decided to take it one day at a time.

I relate this story to my life thus:

24

Success will not Lower its Standards for Us, we Must Raise our Bar – DJ

George narrowed his eyes and took a deep breath. He waited with bated breath for the gunshot.

The referee shouted, "On your mark, get set and go." The gunshot set in motion numerous parallel legs,leaping ahead, each faster than the other.

George had practiced very hard for this tournament and knew this could be his golden ticket to sprint ahead in the world of international sports. The athletic meet was an important one as all selectors had their eyes on it to bring fresh talent to the fore.

George had been running since he was seven years old. He was nineteen now. He had so many medals from wins at inter-school and inter-college athletics events.

This athletic meet would take him to the state level. The winners would get a chance to be a part of the state team. A win here would take George a step closer to international participation.

The selectors were in the stands watching young talent take giant strides. George was in the lead and he was sure he would win. But just then,he faltered. He missed a step and stumbled. Mark overtook him and raced past him. Mark finished first, leaving George crestfallen. He grieved in private.

The selectors committee congratulated George who came in second. But they could pick only one winner for the state level.

George put up a brave face and walked back home dejected. The following few weeks, George stayed away from practice. His coach was worried. He called him to check on his health but George did not pickup the call. The coach waited for two more days. When George failed to turn up, he went to his house only to find it empty. George was nowhere to be found. The coach, Tom Anderson, had grown very fond of George in their six months of association. He was missing George a lot.

"George is not a loser, then why is he behaving like one?" wondered Tom.

Tom visited George's house several times. On his fourth visit, Tom found George staggering inside his house very late at night in a drunken state. George had never been on alcohol, Tom knew that. Tom also knew that the defeat at the selection meet had depressed George and he was unable to accept it. Tom knew that it was difficult to accept your rivals beating you, but there wasn't anything much one could do about it except accepting it gracefully. George would learn this sooner or later, but then there was no time to waste.

Tom decided to have a straight talk with George. The next day, he was in George's house early in the morning. George was not yet up. So Tom took the liberty of making himself a strong cup of coffee. He also made a glass of refreshing lemonade for George to kill his hangover. Seeing Tom at his place at such an early hour embarrassed George. He sheepishly grinned at him and said, "Good morning, coach."

"What coach? I'm no more your coach. I gave you no classes or training in wailing in depression, drinking alcohol and frittering a fine career that only a handful of people are blessed with."

"What career, Tom? I'm finished. I was so close to getting the gold medal, but lady luck refused to smile at me. I guess I need to find a different dream and a different profession in which I can actually succeed. I guess sprinting is not my cup of tea."

"You think the twenty others who ran with you didn't wish to get selected for the state level? Were they content just running around the tracks for their life? It is everyone's dream. Everyone wants to represent their state and their country and be known the world over. One defeat and you are crushed! Wow, what a remarkable attitude! Keep it up."

Tom was taken aback. He had never expected his coach to be so harsh with his words. He had expected a few words of sympathy as he had been so close to victory. George thought he was right to brood and curse his bad luck, as everyone knew what a good sprinter he was. He was not ready for Tom's bitter words.

Tom talked about great people who had failed only to rise from the ashes like a phoenix and shine like a star. He told George about numerous sportsmen and people in other walks of life who, despite failures, never gave up; they kept trying and succeeded to become idols for people like George to emulate. Tom said George had to sit up and take control of his life. He showed him an ant on the floor. Despite falling off the wall thrice, it kept trying to get up. Soon, in a few minutes, the ant was half way up the wall.

"If a small ant can have a never-say-die spirit, why can't you? Compete with yourself. Better your own timing and keep raising your own benchmarks. Soon you will realize that you are way better than the others."

George was dumbfounded. He was in deep thought. His passion and dreams had been ignited and his wings were on fire. He knew that he had wasted enough time already.

It was just one selection match. There were so many more to come. And before they came, he had to ensure that no one would come even a close second. He had to set his standards so high that there would be no chances of defeat the next time.

After Tom left his house, George was on the tracks in no time, with renewed vigor and determination to succeed at all costs.

I relate this story to my life thus:

25

There will Always Be a Response in Every Responsibility – DJ

Emily was a 24-year-old sales executive. She was a social butterfly. She worked only so that she could go clubbing during the weekends. She was very active on social media.

Emily was in a TGIF (Thank God it's Friday) mood that day. She wrapped up work and went home to get ready for the big night in town. She was going to get a few drinks with her friends, followed by dinner and then dancing.

She changed quite a few outfits, trying to find the perfect one for the evening. She finally settled on a red sequined dress. It fitted her well. She straightened her hair and picked out red wedges to match her outfit.

Just as she was putting on the finishing touches on her makeup, her mobile phone pinged.

There was a text message from her sister asking her to come over. She replied saying she was busy. Her sister messaged her again, saying she desperately needed fashion advice from Emily.

Emily loved giving fashion advice. So she texted her friends that she would be a bit late and headed to her sister's house. She rang the bell and her sister came to the door.

"Emily! Thank god."

Emily looked at her sister and said, "You definitely need my help."

Her sister was wearing mismatched earrings, her hair looked unkempt and her stripped pink skirt clashed with her checked yellow shirt.

Her sister looked exasperated as she said, "Tell me about it. I have to go to my reunion in one hour and I am such a mess."

Emily helped put together a nice ensemble for her sister. In no time she looked like she was ready to go to a ball. Emily looked pleased with her work. "You look beautiful."

The sisters hugged each other.

"Thank you!"

Both their phones rang at the same time.

"What do you mean you cannot come? But I have to go. I cannot find someone else so late. Please… Fine, I understand."

Emily said on her phone, "Yes babe, I am on my way." She then turned to her sister and said, "Okay sis, I have to go. You have a great time."

Emily's sister looked crestfallen and said, "My babysitter just cancelled. My husband is stuck at work. There is no way can I go now. I am sorry I wasted your time."

Emily felt bad. She said, "What if I baby sit?"

"Really?" asked her sister.

Emily replied, "Sure. Why not? I can catch up with my friends later in the evening for the dancing. That is what I really want to do anyway."

Her sister was extremely grateful and thanked her and headed out to her reunion.

Emily had no experience with kids. Her nephew was nine years old and was playing the keyboard. She had spent time with him earlier but never alone. She went upstairs.

"Hello Mark."

Mark looked up from his keyboard and asked, "What are you doing here?"

Emily replied, "I am your babysitter for the night."

Mark laughed and said, "Please, what you know about babysitting?"

Emily said, "Well, you can help me learn."

Mark looked at her and rubbed his chin pensively. "Fine. Make me a grilled cheese sandwich."

Emily had no clue how to cook. She went down to the kitchen. She looked up a recipe online and also found a YouTube a video on how to make a grilled cheese sandwich.

She cooked as she watched the video. Mark hid behind the counter watching her. He sniggered at Emily struggling. She failed in her first two attempts before she decided that the third sandwich was edible.

She called out to Mark. He pretended as though he had just come into the kitchen. He ate the sandwich and was impressed with it. He said, "Not bad at all."

Emily smiled as she noticed some grease on her dress. She then asked, "Now what?"

Mark said, "Well, I would like to watch TV but I am supposed to finish homework first."

This time it was Emily who was impressed. She said, "You are a really disciplined boy. Someone else may not have told me that they had to do their homework first."

Mark said, "I am responsible. I not only have to be a good kid while my mom is away but I also have the responsibility of teaching you to be a good babysitter."

Emily laughed.

Mark said, "I need help with my history essay. Will you check it?"

Emily agreed. It was on World War I. She had no clue about it. So she decided to read the chapter on the war in Mark's book and crosscheck it with his essay, while Mark watched TV.

Once she was done, she called him over to point out the changes that were necessary. Mark corrected them according to Emily's suggestions.

Emily's sister called on her mobile phone to check on her.

"Emily, how is it going? Is everything fine? Should I come home?"

Emily smiled and said, "Take your time. How is the reunion?"

"Are you sure? It is great catching up with all my classmates. But I forgot to mention that Mark has to go next door to finish his arts and crafts project."

Emily said, "I will take him. Bye."

Mark and Emily went next door. Emily helped Mark and Louise with their project. Louise's mother offered Emily some refreshments. By the time the project was done, Emily's dress was no longer as attractive as before.

Emily and Mark returned home. Emily decided they both needed a shower. Emily changed into her sister's comfortable clothes. She helped Mark change into his pajamas. She thought she was done cooking for the night and ordered pizzas.

She checked her phone. There were several texts from her friends asking her where she was. She replied that she was helping her sister and that she would call them back later.

Emily also found several missed calls from her sister. She called her back. Her sister sounded frantic, "I am so sorry. My car has broken down. I am so sorry for ruining your evening. I am sure you are dying to leave by now."

Emily said, "It's fine. I am honestly having a better time than I expected."

Her sister sounded relieved as she said, "I will be home as soon as I can."

The land line then rang. Emily answered it.

"Hello."

Stephen, her sister's husband, asked her, "Who is this?"

"Emily."

Stephen said, "How come you answering the landline?"

Emily replied, "Well, it is my duty to respond. After all, I did take on the responsibility to babysit."

Stephen said, "Oh! I just wanted to say that I will be late tonight."

Emily said, "I will let sis know that."

Stephen said, "Thank you."

The pizzas arrived. Both Emily and Mark gobbled them quickly as they were really hungry. Then Emily read Mark a bedtime story and put him to sleep. She sent her sister a text about Stephen being late. Then she curled up on the couch and took a nap. Having fulfilled the responsibility she had taken on, she felt good.

Emily understood what it meant to shoulder responsibilities.

Life is not just a big party. When you take on responsibilities, you have to respond accordingly. Response is part of responsibility.

Emily had learnt that lesson from her little nephew.

I relate this story to my life thus:

26
The Branches that don't Bend with the Flow of Time Break – DJ

Rahul wiped his spectacles for the third time with a tissue. But much to his displeasure, he still could not see clearly. His concerted efforts bore no fruits. They just added to his grouchiness. Watching him, Swarna, his wife for fifty-eight years, couldn't suppress a smile.

Rahul Tiwari was a retired old school headmaster. He had lived all his life in the small town of Faizganj in Uttar Pradesh in India. A strict disciplinarian, Rahul was feared by his school students and teachers alike. He had always been a man of few words and high principles. He chose his words with caution and responsibility.

At the age of seventy-eight, Rahul was all alone. He had no friends and no family except his wife. Swarna lived with him only to fulfill her wedding vows. She often complained that he was responsible for their loneliness in the dusk of their lives.

Swarna was his sole companion who had stood by him through all the rough and smooth times. She was the only one who had stayed with him when their children rebelled against their father, who appeared no less than a tyrant to the young minds. Shiv and Kartik had numerous fallouts with their father.

Though a learned and highly literate person, Rahul was inflexible and impractical. He was not in tune with the times at all.

His children were different from him. Shiva was a keen dramatist and wanted to join the National School of Drama. But Rahul was adamant. He wanted Shiva to become a chartered accountant and forced him to take up commerce in high school. Shiva did so against his will. Shiva was not good with numbers. Mathematical equations and accounting figures created dramatic scenes in his head; he enacted them in his mind sitting in class. Needless to say, his performance at school was not at all satisfactory.

Every day, Rahul lectured Shiva on his dipping grades. But he never understood that Shiva was not meant to work with numbers. Rahul's wife often pleaded with him on behalf of Shiva, but Rahul was adamant. He said

that acting was not a respectable profession and would not fetch him a decent salary even to support himself, leave alone his family.

Before his class twelve results were out, Shiva had a major showdown with his father. Rahul refused to let Shiva sign up for acting school and appear for an admission test. Shiva argued a lot. When his father refused to relent, Shiva snuck out of the house that night and took a train to Delhi.

Rahul was furious and took out all his frustration on Swarna and Kartik. With Shiva gone, he focused all his attention and energy on Kartik. Kartik loved music. He was a talented singer. His voice was truly magical. He devoted all his free time to passionate singing. Kartik wished to learn the nuances of classical singing from a renowned teacher, but he was scared of his father's disapproval.

Kartik's school teachers tried telling Rahul what a gifted singer Kartik was, but knowing their headmaster too well, they could not pursue the discussion. They knew that Rahul considered music, dance and other arts unproductive time-wasting activities.

With Shiva gone, Kartik went into a shell. Swarna was a silent spectator to her son's torment. She tried to reason out with Rahul but he was very rigid. He did not simply relent. Finally, when Swarna could no longer bear it, she called up her brother in Kolkata who was also a music lover. She made arrangements for Kartik to get to Kolkata without his father's knowledge.

Rahul was furious with Swarna and her brother when he was told that Kartik had decided to stay with his uncle. In a fit of fury, Rahul beat Swarna; he suspected her of being behind the plot.

"Go, you wretched woman! You can also leave. But remember one thing: I will not change my mind. Whoever obeys me, stays here. Whoever doesn't want to obey me, can leave."

Swarna too wanted to leave as life was becoming increasingly difficult with a man so stubborn. But then, where would she go? So she continued living with Rahul on his terms.

Twenty odd years later, Shiva became a renowned theatre artist. He conducted workshops for young aspirants. He tried hard to make peace with his father, but Rahul refused to even look at him.

Shiva wished to take his mother with him to Delhi, but she, over the years, had fallen into a dull and drab routine. She also felt that it would be inhuman to leave her husband all alone in his old age for her own happiness.

Meanwhile, Kartik made his mark as a music composer. The Bengali film industry welcomed him with open arms. He had everything: money, recognition and fame. Kartik too asked his mother to move in with him, but she refused stoutly.

At the age of seventy-eight, when Rahul could have basked in the glory his sons, he was isolated and detached from his family.

"If only he had been more flexible and more understanding of the changing times and aspirations of his sons, he wouldn't be alone at the dusk of his life, battling with cataract in both his eyes, with no one to look after him except a faithful wife, life would have been so happy and complete for all of us," sighed Swarna.

I relate this story to my life thus:

27
To Realize your Desires, Map them with your Thoughts and Inner Dialogues – DJ

He knew he had to walk fast. They would catch up anytime and then he would be gone for good. He quickened his pace. He was soon out of breath. He knew if he had to save his life, he had no time to waste. Under no circumstance could he let them have the microchip, which contained vital information that could land him in a soup. His long-cherished dream of holding the reins of the million-dollar company where he was working would fall apart. He had to hurry.

Jim Davis was a research scientist. He had spent six years finding a sure-shot cure for cancer, however terminal it was. His experiments on animals had worked miraculously. The day before, he had tested his drug on human beings and obtained positive results. In twenty-four hours, the drug had killed all terminal cancer cells and also initiated a healthy growth of normal cells in the system. Once in the system, the mutant strains beat even the advanced stage cancer cells. Yes! Jim had created history and his research findings would soon make him the new god. His years of research were about to pay off, not only for Jim but for the entire human race as well.

Ten years ago, Jim's mother had succumbed to cancer. That's when Jim decided to put an end to the deadly disease. He knew he had to work his way through college to get a scholarship for higher studies to be able to get into research. Slowly and smartly, Jim, who had the IQ of a genius, proved his mettle in undergrad college and then post-graduation, before he excelled in M. Phil. During his internship, he was offered a job by the world's biggest pharmaceutical company.

As part of his research work at the pharma company, Jim made several small discoveries and found new by-products, which were highly beneficial to the company. His contributions to the pharmaceutical company were undisputedly fantastic.

The cure for cancer would be a phenomenal victory for Jim, his company, science and the entire human race. The first time Jim disclosed the news of his positive findings, the head of his department was amazed. He immediately forwarded the good news to the CEO and the Managing Director of the company. The company issued standing instructions of complete secrecy and confidentiality in the matter till they made any announcements. Meanwhile, the management had secret meetings with Jim. When the management was convinced of the veracity of the new drug, trouble began to brew for Jim. Pressure started to mount on him to give the formula to the company's managing director, who was keen to market the drug at premium prices.

Jim wanted the benefits of the drug to be far-reaching. He wanted it to be made available to the rich and poor alike. After all, the inputs he had used had incurred insignificant costs. He could not let the cure for cancer be made available only to a handful rich. He did not want anyone to die of cancer anymore. He did not want anyone to go through pain and agony like his mother had. Jim decided to give his formula to the state, which could make his wish come true.

But for all that to happen, he had to get out of this place safely. His mind was racing against time to find a way out. Even if he hid the microchip somewhere, the guys from his company would put him through unbearable torture to reveal the hiding place. He was not sure if he could withstand that. He had to think of a way out.

The road ahead was dark with no lights. His instincts told him the guys would split up to find him. He knew he had to mislead them. He took out his cigarette lighter from his trouser pocket, aimed it at a distance and threw it as far as he could. Immediately, he heard footsteps rushing in the direction of the sound and that did the trick. He got enough time and space to reposition himself quietly. He hid in a sack and lay there holding his breath, till the goons moved further ahead looking for him. Soon they were all gone in a different direction.

Jim had to act fast. He had to find a way to talk to the health minister of the state. He also had to ensure adequate police protection for him and his

formula. He felt his pocket for his cellphone. It was missing.

"Damn! I have to reach a cyber café fast and get his contact information. I can't come so close and lose everything. There must be cyber café somewhere here."

Jim walked around the dark streets to find a dimly lit area. A few shops were open even at the odd hour. If only he could get access to a computer. Ah! There it was, just around the corner.

Jim quickly got in the dingy hub, which was full of night birds. He logged in and browsed for the required information. The contact information was on the state government website. He made a quick note of the email id and sent an email from his personal id.

Now all he could do was wait for a response from the state before he came out of his hiding. He hoped the government did not dismiss his email as a hoax.

He was wrong. The response was quick and positive. The state government officials wanted to meet him and give him the police protection that Jim had demanded.

Jim heaved a sigh of relief. He was sure that things would go according to his plans. No one would die of cancer now.

The next morning, Jim changed his guise and came out of his hiding. He headed for the meeting venue. The entire state health machinery was eagerly awaiting his arrival.

In the next thirty minutes, reassurances were given from both sides. Jim had to prove that his drug was indeed a miracle cure and the health ministry had to assure him that it would produce and market the drug at nominal prices.

That night, Jim had a relaxed sleep for the first time since his mother's death.

I relate this story to my life thus:

28
Tolerance is not Suppression of One's Feelings, it is Acceptance of Other's Ways – DJ

No two people in the world were more different than Anu and Mallika. The two girls had met in high school and had remained friends since then. Anu was studying to be an aeronautical engineer while Mallika was an artist. Both were struggling to meet their financial obligations and decided to share an apartment to minimize expenses.

Anu and Mallika shared the apartment, the expenses and all the responsibilities that came with living together. Anu was extremely organized, neat and focused. Mallika, on the other hand, was messy, forgetful and all over the place.

While Anu was methodical in her chores, Mallika was a bit lost. So Anu reminded her of her tasks and pushed her to do things on time. Inspite of their differences in lifestyles and habits, they were very good friends.

But Anu was exasperated with Mallika's habits.

"Mallika, why are you so messy? You are useless without me to help you. Absolutely useless!"

"Come on, Anu. You know I am an artist. This is how creative people function."

Anu was getting tired of cleaning her friend's mess. They two often fought over the messy house.

"Mallika, you are so useless. You do not do anything around here."

While Anu felt Mallika did not do enough, Mallika felt under appreciated for her efforts. Their friendship was gradually getting strained. However, they decided that they would stay together for the sake of finances. But they began to nurture apathy towards each other. They suppressed their true emotions and feelings and tolerated each other's habits.

The two girls were not happy living together. They were rather grumpy and were just going through the motions.

One thing that Anu and Mallika had in common was their passion for food. Living together, they had learnt to cook. Anu was good at vegetarian food while Mallika was a genius at cooking meat. Anu was slow and precise with her cooking while Mallika would breeze through the dishes, improvising each time. They cooked together often. Depending on the dish being cooked, one would take charge while the other followed. This was the only time that the girls felt happy being together.

One day, Anu saw a flyer in college for a cooking competition to be held by the Sheraton group of hotels to promote a food fair in Delhi. The winning team would be awarded a cash price of fifty thousand rupees. Since both Mallika and she needed the money, Anu registered themselves for the competition. As it was the last day for registrations, she didn't wait to ask Mallika. She decided to tell Mallika that night.

That night, while the girls were sitting down to eat dinner, Anu said, "Mallika, I have registered our names for a cooking competition. The winner…"

Before Anu could finish her sentence, Mallika started yelling, "This is typical of you! Taking decisions on behalf of the two of us. Don't you think you should have discussed it with me before registering? How dare…"

Soon Anu started yelling, "Taking decisions on behalf of both of us? Please! If I do not show initiative, nothing will get done around here. Also…"

A screaming match exploded between the girls.

Mallika said, "I do not have time for your stupid competition. I will not be controlled by you anymore."

Anu retorted, "Control! As though any one can ever control you. Besides, why would I want to control you? If only you let me finish…"

Mallika turned red in the face as she replied, "Oh, so you think I am some kind of an animal and…"

Both of them were not listening to each other. They were arguing over issues that were unrelated to the competition. These were issues they had suppressed for so long and they reached a breaking point finally.

Anu stormed out of the apartment and Mallika broke down in her room.

Though the girls didn't want to live with each other anymore, they continued to share the apartment for financial reasons. It was each one to herself. They no longer shared the chores. Anu found it difficult to manage her studies and handle all the chores without Mallika to help her. Anu realized that although she had to remind Mallika to do things, life had been easier with Mallika's help.

Mallika also realized how difficult life was without Anu's organizational skills. She had to manage everything on her own and was finding it difficult to keep track of all the tasks that had to be done.

The girls did not speak to each other much. There was stoic silence in the house. The girls also stopped cooking together.

Over time, they started missing each other.

One day, Anu decided to cook meat as she was tired of eating vegetables. But she was not very good at it. Trying hard to cook meat, she burnt her hand a couple of times. She also cut her finger badly. Anu quickly ran to the sink and put her finger under running water. She howled in pain."Oh no! This is so bad. It hurts."

Just then, Mallika entered the house and saw a pool of blood on the floor. She was shocked. She forgot all about their fight and asked worriedly, "Anu, what happened? Are you okay?"

Mallika rushed to her friend and saw the cut. Her heart melted seeing her friend in pain. She hugged her tight and said, "Let me clean your wound and bandage you."

Mallika went into her room and brought a first-aid kit. Anu was surprised, "Since when did you become so organized that you actually have a first-aid kit?"

Mallika started cleaning Anu's wound with Dettol. She sheepishly said, "Since the time I lost my friend who used to take care of me."

Anu felt a pang of pain and warmth at the same time. She allowed Mallika to bandage her hand. When she was finished, Anu said, "I am useless without

your help. I know I am difficult at times, but these last few weeks…"

Mallika cut her short and said in a very calm tone, "I have missed you too my friend. What can I do to make it up? I have been so lost without you…"

Anu replied, "No Mallika, without your help, I am unable to balance my work and…"

Once again the girls were not listening to each other. But this time they realized what was happening as they had a newfound appreciation of each other. They accepted each other for who they truly were. They were willing to tolerate each other's habits not because of financial obligations but for the role they played in each other's life. True tolerance is accepting a person for who they are.

Their conversation ended in laughter and hugs. There were tears again but they were tears of happiness. Mallika offered to help Anu with the cooking. Anu was glad for the help.

As they were cooking, Mallika asked, "So about this cooking competition, do you still want to enter?"

Anu said, "Of course. But only if you are my teammate as I am useless without you." She also told Mallika that she had registered their names without checking with her as it had been the last day for entries.

The girls laughed heartily. They soon started planning the menu and the details of practice before the competition. They were excited to be back together.

I relate this story to my life thus:

29
What you Think is True, is not Always True – DJ

Peter was driving down the road desperately looking for the office of the School of Languages. He had taken some time off work to register for classes in Russian. He was determined to learn the language as he believed it would help him progress in his career.

He pulled over to the side of the road and called the office, "Hello, can you please tell me where the school is located? I wanted to register for your classes and I am on my way."

The man on the other end said, "Of course. Which side are you coming from?"

Peter replied, "From Zakir Hussain Marg."

The man said, "I am not sure where that is but the office is located…"

Beep, Beep, Honk, Honk.

There was massive honking from behind. Peter's car was holding up the traffic. People were yelling at him to move his vehicle. He quickly requested the man at the other end to send him a text message with the office address. He then disconnected the phone and sped off in his car.

Since he did not receive any text message, he decided to use Google Maps to locate the office. It gave him the coordinates of Greater Kailash. He drove through the maddening traffic of Delhi and made it to the address. However, he could not locate the office. He asked people nearby, "Excuse me, *yeh address kahanhai* (where is this address)?"

No one seemed to know where the office of the School of Languages was in Greater Kailash. Peter called the office again."Sir, I am in Greater Kailash." The man at the other end sounded confused and said, "But our office is near Kotla."

Peter was tired of driving. It was the month of May and he was sweating profusely. He tried to calm himself down as much as possible and said, "Sir,

you did not send me a message so I used Google Maps and it brought me to Greater Kailash."

The man insisted that he had sent Peter a text message. For the next two minutes, he kept repeating that he had sent him the address. Frustrated, Peter tried to interject the man and ask him again where the office was located.

Finally, the man said, "It is at the Defence Colony signal."

Peter quickly disconnected the phone and looked at his watch. He was getting for work, but he was determined to register for these classes. So he drove like a maniac, dodging things on the way and swerving around cars. Finally, he turned onto the road under the South Extension flyover.

He quickly called the office and asked, "Sir, is it on the Kotla side or the Defence Colony side?"

The man replied, "It is on the Kotla side. As soon as you reach the signal, take a left. It is opposite Axis Bank."

Peter was having a tough time managing the phone and navigating through the traffic. He had broken his cardinal rule of not talking on the mobile phone while driving. The man spoke incessantly and Peter politely disconnected saying he would call again after taking the turn.

Peter asked a pedestrian where Axis Bank was and the pedestrian replied, "In front. Go straight."

Peter was pleased that he was finally on the right track. He drove ahead and made it to the signal. He took the left turn. As soon as he turned, he realized he was in the wrong location. The only thing he could see around him was mechanics fixing cars.

By this time, Peter was soaked in sweat and extremely late to work. He was losing his ability to control his temper. He called the office and said, "Sir, can you send someone here? You gave me the wrong directions and now I am stuck here."

The man immediately tried to clarify and asked Peter to take a U-turn. Peter was extremely angry and disconnected the call in the middle of a sentence. The man tried to call him back but Peter ignored the call.

Peter fought his way out of Kotla and made his way back to the main road through a side lane in his car. He took a U-turn and parked his car near Defence Colony and picked up his phone. He had received a text message from the man with the address. He called the office again and said, "I have taken a U-turn. Can you send someone here?"

The man agreed to send someone to get Peter. Peter waited for ten minutes and then called back. The man said that a driver was coming to get Peter. Peter requested for the driver's mobile number. The man paused for a minute and said, "I will have to look for it. I will message it to you."

Peter waited another ten minutes. Since there was no text message, he called again. The man said,"The driver tried to look for you but you were not there. He had to leave."

Peter lost his temper. He started yelling, "Have you ever driven through Kotla? It is so hot here. Do you even know where you are located? This is terrible. If you are located so close to the signal, why don't you come here?"

The man tried to explain but by then Peter was shaking in anger and disconnected the phone. As a last ditch effort, he asked someone on the road where Axis Bank was located. The passer-by informed him, "There are two Axis banks: one ahead and one behind." Since Peter had already been to the one behind, he decided to try the one ahead.

Peter drove ahead and there it was. The elusive office of the School of Languages. Peter was so angry that he no longer wanted to sign up for the class. However, that would not do any good to his professional growth. So he decided he would first register for the class and then meet the man who was so bad with directions and give him a piece of his mind. He parked his car and stormed upstairs.

He reached the third floor, ready to yell at the man he had spoken with over the phone but he stopped open-mouthed.

The man sitting at the desk and answering phones was blind and differently-abled. He heard Peter's voice and said, "You finally made it. You never let me explain over the phone. The reason I could not come to the signal is I cannot

walk. Also, I apologize for confusing you with directions. There is only one route I know as I cannot see. I am very sorry for the inconvenience. Would you like to still register for the classes?"

Peter felt extremely guilty. He signed up for the classes. Instead of yelling at the man, Peter explained to the man how to give directions to anyone trying to locate the office.

The man was extremely grateful for Peter's suggestions.

Peter left the office feeling relieved that he had finally managed to register for the classes and also happy to have helped someone. His phone pinged. The backlog of messages from the man at the office flashed on his mobile screen. For some odd reason, he was receiving the messages late.

Peter drove to his office thinking aloud. "What a fool I was, ready to yell at this man who was trying his best." He had assumed that the man was incompetent or an idiot but now he realized that what one presumes to be true may not always true. There can be several perspectives and reasons for everything.

I relate this story to my life thus:

30

When Someone shows Anger, be Calm and Become the Mirror that Reflects their Real Self – DJ

Keep the calm, not the anger.

It had been a long day in office. Avni was exhausted. She decided to call it a day even though the clock on the wall disagreed with her. She threw a glance at her boss' cabin. Thrilled to find him missing from his seat, she slung her bag on her shoulder, grabbed her laptop and headed towards the door when she nearly bumped into Shourya.

"Oh! Leaving early, are we?" asked Shourya.

"Yes, I am not feeling too well," said Avni.

Shourya gave her a look that conveyed his disbelief. He simply wouldn't let go of any opportunity to insult or annoy her.

Shourya and Avni were working together on a project. Trouble and tension began brewing ever since the project started. Instead of working as a team, Shourya tried to outsmart Avni and find fault with her work and style of working.

Avni tried hard not to get irritated with Shourya's attempts to take credit for everything and disregard her contributions. She couldn't protest as complaints about co-workers would only fetch her a negative appraisal.

But Avni was smart. She knew how to handle people like Shourya. She tried to avoid a direct showdown with him and looked for ways to outsmart him in front of her boss. Just yesterday, she had drafted a foolproof work plan, which Shourya tried to scuttle. But the boss had praised the plan.

The next morning was chaotic. Her alarm didn't ring. When she finally woke up, it was already nine. She knew it would take her at least two hours to get ready and reach office. So she thought of taking the day off. She started to dial her office number when she realized that there was a presentation that day.

"God! Did I have to oversleep today, of all the days?" Avni cursed herself and showered at jet speed. She chose an outfit that needed no accessories, thus saving valuable time. She grabbed her hair brush and makeup kit to use on her way to office. She poured herself a glass of juice, gulped it down, grabbed her handbag and rushed out to catch an auto rickshaw.

Waiting for two minutes seems like an eternity when you are late. No one could agree with this more than Avni that day. More than being late to work, she was afraid of the ruckus Shourya would create. Generally, friends covered up for each other in case of delays and goof-ups but Shourya was no friend. He was the most unpopular guy in the office. She called Ananya at the reception to let her know that she would be late by an hour.

"Chill Avni, your presentation is not due for an hour," said Ananya.

Relieved by what Ananya told her, Avni relaxed for the first time since morning.

Avni was lost in thoughts when she entered office. She was greeted by none other than the boss himself.

"Gggoodmorning, sir," she stuttered.

"Morning, Avni! We start our presentation in half an hour. I hope that gives you enough time to settle down."

Avni thanked him and told him that she was ready.

She looked around for Shourya. He was chatting with Randip at his desk.

"Shourya, can we run over the presentation once?"

"Relax Avni. I've done everything. All you have to do is go in there and present it as yours, as always, and impress the boss," smirked Shourya, glancing at Randip with an 'I-told-you-so' look.

Avni blazed. Shourya had contributed nothing towards the presentation except compile everything and copy it onto a CD. The complete analysis and inferences had been done by Avni, while Shourya went around telling everyone that he was stuck with a silent partner who did nothing.

Every one assembled in the conference room for the presentation.

Avni hooked up the CD that Shourya had given her. She began with the introduction and waited for the presentation to start. But it did not start. She asked Shourya to check the CD. Shourya fumbled with it but there was nothing in it.

The CD was blank. That was the only thing that Shourya had to do but he hadn't done that as well. To top it, he simply passed the buck. He said, "Maybe Avni got late and brought the wrong CD in a hurry."

Avni was furious. She knew she couldn't defend herself. She asked for a two-minute break. She had saved the presentation in a pen drive as she did not trust Shourya with anything. She quickly came back and resumed the presentation like a true professional.

She put across her ideas in a detailed manner. She was again in her boss' good books.

Avni concluded her presentation by saying that it had been wonderful to work with Shourya who had given his best inputs to make the project a great success. "The project was a team effort and the bouquets and brickbats shall be shared," she said.

Before leaving, the boss appreciated their teamwork and said that both of them would get their promotions soon.

Shourya was dumbstruck. He certainly had not anticipated this. He felt guilty. He had tried everything to sabotage Avni's presentation but she had tolerated him with a cool head. He felt small in front of her towering, forgiving personality. It was time to talk to Avni.

"You have been a great sport, Avni. Your foresight not just saved us today but has also earned us a promotion. I am truly sorry for the entire goof-up."

Avni extended her hand, "Friends?"

"Friends," said Shourya, shaking her hand.

I relate this story to my life thus:

31
Whenever in Fear, Remember that a Seed is Being Planted for Growth – DJ

Sid was a brilliant dancer. He was one of the best impressionists of Michael Jackson in India. He could do the moonwalk. He taught himself break dance. Initially his videos were a hit among friends and family. Then began the crazy fan following from all over. When he did break dance in the clubs, everyone stopped and watched.

Many guys came up to him and said, "You are so good. Where did you learn to dance?"

Sid would proudly say, "Man, I was born dancing."

He soon started appearing on television. He won contests such as Boogie Woogie and Dance India Dance. Very soon, girls started mobbing him for autographs. He acquired great fame and fan following in a short time.

Sid loved the attention. He tipped his hat if he thought a girl was cute. If he found someone very good-looking, he took off his 'sunnies' (as he called 'sunglasses' after listening to Australians on TV) and winked at them.

It was not too long before he was chosen to join an international dance troupe for a world tour. This was a great opportunity for Sid. But he also had to work harder than ever before.

No doubt he was unbelievably talented. His every move had several nuances. He was also very hardworking. He practiced for hours in front of the mirror. He learnt to control his movements. He taught himself dance moves by watching YouTube videos. He became an international sensation.

Newspaper and magazines compared him to Michael Jackson and warned Prabhu Deva and Hritik Roshan to watch out for Sid.

Sid felt as though he was invincible and flying on top of the world. He decided to try this hard move that he had seen on YouTube. He practiced it several times. Although he had not perfected it, he was confident of pulling it off with practice.

One day, while practicing this move,which he hoped would become his signature move with the addition of his own twist, he had a major accident. He fell hard while attempting a cartwheel mid-air. He yelled in pain, "Aaaahhhhh!"

People came running to him. They tried to move him but he yelled louder. He was rushed to the emergency room in Malaysia.

The doctor conducted tests. He came back with terrible news for Sid. The doctor told him, "You cannot put pressure on your knee. You need to take it easy."

Sid anxiously asked, "I am scheduled to perform in Hungary with my dance troupe. How soon can I get back to practice?"

The doctor replied, "I don't think you understood me. I don't think you can carry on being a professional dancer."

Sid was shocked. He said, "I do not understand. Dance is my life. I know nothing else."

The doctor said, "Well, you have to decide: dance or the ability to walk."

Sid felt as though he was in a nightmare. He kept hoping that everything would be fine when he woke up. However, that was not the case. He was discharged from the hospital.

Sid was depressed and demoralized. He no longer knew what to do with himself. He could not pursue his passion; he felt as though his life had been stolen from him.

In the hope to divert his mind, his parents suggested that Sid visit family friends in Peru. Sid reluctantly agreed. Even after reaching Peru, he continued to feel depressed and dead from inside. He was simply going through the motions of life. Nothing seemed to cheer him up.

His family friends took him to see the ruins of Machu Picchu. They were towering and seemed larger than life, representing centuries of existence of the Incas. But Sid was unmoved. He was forced to try out the varied cuisine of Peru – from *ceviche to chifa*. Sid ate the ceviche, a dish made from raw fish, mechanically without relishing it. No one knew what to do with Sid. Sid told his family, "I want to come home. This is useless."

The day before catching his flight back to Delhi, he went for a walk through the streets of Mira Flores in Peru. He could hear the sea from a distance. He saw several people walking down to the shore, surfboards in hand.

Sid suddenly heard some music. Following the music, he reached a dance studio.

Before he could stop himself, Sid found himself walking into the studio. He watched the people in the studio dancing. The instructor shouted to Sid, "Everybody must dance. We do not allow people to just stand and stare."

Sid was taken aback as the instructor spoke flawless English. He had assumed that everyone in Peru spoke only Spanish. As though coming out of a reverie, Sid said, "I…I do not do this… Whatever this dance is, I do not know it."

The instructor said, "That is great news. Now you can be a student and I can get paid to teach you."

The instructor grinned at Sid.

Sid confused replied, "I am not allowed to dance. Doctor's orders."

The instructor looked him up and down and asked, "What is wrong with you, my friend? Do you not know that salsa is all about making your partner shine? Let me teach you how to make your partner dance."

Sid quickly said, "But I am not supposed to stress my knee."

The instructor laughed and said, "So we will not stress your knee."

The salsa instructor paired Sid with Regina. Sid felt out of his element. He did not feel comfortable dancing. He was not good at salsa. He felt awkward and was not sure of what he was doing. This was an alien feeling to him. Not so long ago, he had been a star performer.

However, Sid, for the first time in months, felt as though he was alive again. He was dancing again, albeit not very well, but it made him happy.

He went home. That night, he cancelled his return flight. He found accommodation in a hostel near Mira Flores and told his family friends that he was traveling around Peru by himself.

Instead, he began frequenting the dance studio where he tried to master the art of salsa. No matter how hard he tried, he was unable to progress at the pace he wanted. He was afraid of being ridiculed and thus kept it a secret. He did not feel confident dancing with Regina as he felt he was not good. He did not want to perform in front of people. He was happy practicing alone in the studio. He did not want to practice in clubs.

His instructor kept pushing him to go to the clubs and dance but Sid was not confident. He finally found the courage to go to a club. But he stood in a corner and did not ask anyone to dance with him. Regina saw him standing in the corner alone and asked, "Why are you not dancing?"

Sid arrogantly replied, "I will dance only when I feel I am good enough. That day, I will be a great dancer again."

Regina looked at him and said, "The only thing holding you back is your fear. Your fear stands between you and your desire to become a great dancer."

She also said, "I have seen videos of you dancing on YouTube."

Sid was surprised, "I didn't know that you knew that I was once a dancer."

Regina said, "You ARE a dancer. The only difference between then and now is your confidence. In the videos, I saw a confident man who enjoyed dancing. But when you practice with me, you are so serious and conscious. You are letting your fear of failure deter you."

That night Sid thought about what Regina had said. He reflected on it and realized it was his fear of failure, and not his knee injury,that had paralyzed him. He realized that when one takes an action with fear in his mind, the action gets stalled, leading to stagnation as a person and a professional as well.

Sid decided to take a bold step and tell his parents about salsa. He called his parents over Skype and told them about his classes and how they made him happy. His mother was overjoyed. She said, "Sid, I am glad that you are alive again. I would advise you to use this injury as an opportunity to master another form of dance. Use your fear as a stepping stone. Move forward, let it drive you, do not let it cripple you. Look at it as a seed being planted for growth in this world."

With these words of encouragement, Sid decided to abandon his fear and embrace the opportunity to plant a new seed,which would help him become a performer again—as a salsa dancer.

I relate this story to my life thus:

32
You are a Musician In your Life's Music Album – DJ

"Alia! Wake up!" hissed someone. "Alia! Wake up or you'll get caught," hissed someone again, poking Alia with an elbow.

"Ouch! Dude, what are you doing?" cried Alia.

"Ahhh! Miss Kapoor, do you have something to say to us?" asked the professor, eyeing her with suspicion.

"No, sir. Nothing interesting," replied Alia and took her seat, secretly hoping to get a few more minutes of sleep in class. After all, it was one of those boring lectures on careers and placements, a topic that made her lose interest as quickly as playing music caught her attention.

She was a musical genius. Most people called her a 'boom box.' She could create a masterpiece within minutes and her voice was indeed god's gift. Yet she lost interest in everything she did very quickly.

Alia could never complete what she started. She would commence school projects, college assignments and hobby classes with plenty of enthusiasm but it fizzled out fast. She simply couldn't bring herself to complete her tasks. She required serious deadlines, stern reminders and penalties to complete them.

Her friends were a great help to her. They often helped her finish most of her projects as she neared her deadlines. But she didn't realize that she was running out of time and didn't make any life-changing decisions.

The lecture on career management left Alia in a sea of questions and doubts. She came out of class hoping to get some fresh air. But that didn't help either. So she went back to class to seek advice from her friends on what she should do in life.

"Alia, you know what you are supposed to do. Create music. You are the best when it comes to making music," said Kritika, her best friend.

"But she is also good at writing," said Aditya. "Alia, you should get into print media. You will do wonders there."

"You guys are not helping me. I need something I can build my life on. Not something I'm good at but something that will help me pay the bills and lead a comfortable life," said Alia

"Alia, not everything has to be done for a better living. Some things have to be done for a better life," said Kritika.

This made Alia think deep. "Was Kritika right? Would it be better to have a future in music or writing than earn an MBA degree and work as a manager in a big company?"

There was only one way to find out.

"Okay, I think I have made my decision," said Alia and took a deep breath. "I'm going to do different kinds of jobs and internships and take up the one that suits me the best."

Kritika and Aditya opened their eyes wide. Aditya asked, "Really? You? The girl who has never finished her projects on time is going to do something so unpredictable?"

"Well, you guys could be a little supportive of me," said Alia.

"We support you no matter what Alia, but just think about it seriously. Okay?" said Aditya.

"I will," said Alia. But she knew she wasn't going to change her mind. And her friends knew that too.

Alia went home and looked up a number of job portals for good job opportunities. She found good job openings in big, well-known companies for the posts of marketing and customer care executives.

To her disappointment, her job application wasn't accepted by any big company. Only a small new company offered her a position. She took it up hoping it would be her dream job. She started the job but very soon she got tired of the pressure and quit. She then took up the job of a secretary, hoping it would be less tiring but following orders was not her thing. Before quitting, she told her boss to take care of his own tasks. She then got a job in a big law firm as a manager,on the recommendation of a relative who thought she could handle a little pressure. But this time she did take the pressure quite easily.

There were two reasons: one, she didn't want to quit another job and second, this job seemed easier than the position at the previous firm.

Every day, Alia walked from the metro station to her office looking at the beauty of the streets. Next to her office, a musician played his guitar so passionately that it was difficult for Alia to concentrate on her job. She often peeked out of the window and looked at the guitarist playing music and making people happy. Some days, she went down during lunch break just to listen to the mesmerizing tunes of the guitarist. It reminded her of the happy days in college when she was always singing and playing her guitar. But the fact that she had to return to her desk soon killed her from inside.

This went on for a few days until she went to the guitarist and spoke to him for the first time. She asked him if she could play his guitar for a few minutes. The guitarist was more than willing to share his love for music with another music lover. As soon as she took the guitar in her hand, the magic inside her began to glow. She started playing the guitar with such passion and dedication that every person in the neighbour hood stopped to hear her play. When she finally stopped and looked up, people around her began to clap and cheer her.

"You have a great gift. Do come by again in your free time. I believe we can create something big," said the guitarist, with a smile on his face.

"I would love to," replied Alia.

On her way back to her office, she felt completely different and totally herself. She finally realized that music was her destiny and it would be wrong to throw it away. So she made a decision that changed her life forever.

She quit her job. She left everything and went down to the guitarist with an idea so great that it would change both their lives.

"Would you like to start a record label with me?" Alia asked the guitarist with a smile on her face and hope in her eyes.

"Sure, I would love to," replied the guitarist. "I'm Arjun by the way."

"And I am Alia."

They both went out for a cup of coffee.

Alia finally made a grand new beginning and she would take it till the end this time.

I relate this story to my life thus:

33
Your Business Runs on only Two Things: building Customers and Building Relationships with Them – DJ

Tom Henderson was upset. He had just fired one of his employees and all the staff seemed to crib about the dismissal. But Tom was very clear about his policy: no one in his mall, including himself, could speak to customers in that tone.

Tom had started his business twelve years ago with a small shop in Central Park. He knew there was a great demand for electrical goods in that area, as it was close to an upcoming residential society and opposite a government office complex, which required frequent changes in electrical parts.

Tom was an extremely warm and affable person who loved to interact with people. His outgoing personality helped him win over many people and soon he had people flocking to his shop for every electrical requirement.

With a steady flow of people to his shop, he was sharp enough to assess the likes and dislikes of people around him. He knew that it was difficult to build a large customer base but maintaining a lifelong relationship was even more complicated.

Tom quickly expanded his business with his strong business acumen. Soon he was running three more shops in the area. The profits from his business soared and Tom invested in a plot of land on which he built his dream project —a shopping mall. Within a year, the work at the site was completed. The grand mall was soon inaugurated by the mayor.

Tom had built his connections well over time. He believed in keeping in touch with all his esteemed customers. He started a 'Connect with Us' service, which focused on tracking the company's customers and their shopping habits.

One day, Tom was on his routine rounds. He made it a point to visit all his shops in the city to keep the staff on their toes always.

Joe was deliberately ignoring a customer when Tom entered the shop. Tom pretended not to notice this. He walked straight into his cabin after exchanging

pleasantries with the people he knew. He switched on his CCTV to watch Joe deal with the customer.

Tom was puzzled to see Joe sitting idle while the customer tried hard to look at the items on display. He had given standing instructions to all his employees on how customers must be treated. What Joe was doing blatantly violated his principles of customer creation and retention.

Tom immediately went outside and helped the lady who was looking for designer electrical ware for her brother's wedding. Tom didn't just seal the deal with his immaculate behaviour but he also earned a valuable customer who would bring at least twenty more customers through word-of-mouth publicity. Sale or no sale, a good customer review always gave Tom a sense of fulfillment in business and life.

After the lady left, Tom walked up to Joe and quietly said, "Joe! It was nice working with you. Please hand over your responsibilities to Mark before leaving. We shall no longer require your services. This month's check will be ready tomorrow. You may please collect it from the accounts department anytime the day after. Thank you."

Joe was stupefied. He was not keeping well but had still come to work. He was a good salesman with a good track record. He tried to reason with Tom but Tom was a stickler for rules.

Tom sat in his office after Joe's dismissal. He was upset as most of his staff seemed unhappy with his decision.

Tom addressed his staff, "I am sure you think I have been a bad employer as some of you have to come to work in spite of ill health. But I cannot afford someone to create a bad impression of my business. I am sure all of you understand how difficult it is to reach the top and be number one. I feel it's even more difficult to stay at the top. People are constantly looking for small and petty reasons to find flaws in your quality, work and behavior. People want to pull you down always. No one will notice that Joe was not well. They will notice his disinterest and aloof behavior and this sends all the wrong kinds of signals. If you are not well, you better stay at home. I'll take care of you. But you are here to care of my customers and build bonds that last a lifetime. I

shall not let anyone tarnish the image of Tom Henderson's company. Have I made myself clear?"

The staff was silent. They understood the impact one person's misconduct could have on business, even if it was unintentional.

"I'm sorry, sir. I should have stayed at home. My distracted behaviour may have cost our company a lot. Please forgive me," Joe begged.

Tom was a soft person at heart. He knew Joe had been a great salesman in the past and this was his first slip-up. When Joe pleaded again, Tom softened a bit. He decided to send Joe to another store where his customers did not know him as an indifferent salesman.

But before re-inducting Joe, he told his staff firmly, "This is the first and the last time I'm making such an exception. I do not wish to see such indolent behavior from any of you, however crucial the reason maybe. Hope I have made myself clear."

The entire staff, including Joe, was happy with the turn of events. They had learnt an important lesson that day: a good customer base was key to a great business, but a lasting relationship with customers is personally satisfying.

I relate this story to my life thus:

34
The Sexiest Part of the Body is the Brain, use it Wisely – DJ

Sanjay walked slowly but steadily to his destination. He was a man on a mission. He had been an accountant for the last thirty years. His life had been all about numbers. He was in his late fifties and not ready to quit working as yet.

Sanjay did not feel like he was fifty-six. Inside, he still felt young. He was fun-loving, gentle and generous. He had never harmed anyone in his life. He had no bad habits. He did not indulge in smoking or drinking, other than the brief phase in college when he smoked and drank, but then he believed that everybody goes through that phase.

Sanjay had a small family. He had married his college sweetheart Preeti. She was a writer at *The Hindu*, a national newspaper. Together they built a little world of their own. Preeti was unable to conceive a child, so they decided that the two of them were enough for each other.

During the course of twenty-two years of marriage, they adopted several pets – from dogs and cats to birds and even a turtle.

Sanjay recalled the events of the past few days as he walked to his destination.

Preeti sat close to him. She held his hand. She held it a little too tight. She was very nervous. They both looked anxiously at the doctor in front of them.

The thirty-something doctor wore black horn rimmed glasses and a white jacket. He had Sanjay's chart in his hand. He looked at the old couple and smiled.

The doctor thought to himself, "What a lovely couple! I hope I can share such companionship with my wife when we are older."

He smiled and said, "I know this is worrisome. It must be hard for you, for both of you. I suggest that Sanjay checks into the hospital for a few days so that we can try and figure out the problem with his memory."

Sanjay hated hospitals. Throughout his childhood he had been in and out of hospitals due to severe asthma. He was forced to try all kinds of allopathic and alternative remedies. Once he was made to swallow a live fish because the quack said it would open up his sinuses.

The last thing Sanjay wanted was to be in a hospital. But he knew he would have to do it. Things had become too scary to ignore the many longer.

Preeti discussed and chalked out the details with Dr Ramesh. Sanjay was letting his wife handle all the logistics.

Sanjay walked with purpose and reached the hospital. He had arrived at his destination. He had told Preeti not to accompany him as he wanted to do this on his own. He walked up to the reception and told the lady at the desk, "One room please."

The lady was surprised and said, "What? What did you say?"

Sanjay replied, "I asked for a room."

The lady looked irritated and said, "Sir, this is not a hotel. It is a hospital."

Sanjay laughed, "I know, young lady. I have not lost my entire mind yet. Although Dr Ramesh has me worried that I am losing a little bit of it everyday."

The lady responded, "Oh, you are Dr Ramesh's patient? Yes, yes, we have your room all set up. The machines are ready. I will have someone take you there and the doctor will see you in half an hour after you are settled in."

Sanjay laughed heartily, "Miss, are you sure this is not a hotel? Because from what you have told me, it sure sounds like I have been allotted a suite and a bellboy will take me to the room before the host checks on me."

The lady looked embarrassed. She handed Sanjay the paperwork to be filled out. Sanjay took care of all the paperwork and the payments. He gave the lady the forms and asked, "Which way to my suite?"

The lady asked one of the helper boys to escort Sanjay to his room. Sanjay looked around the room. There was a steel bed. It looked cold and uninviting. The sheets were white, extremely white. The room looked like it had recently been disinfected. The strong smell of Lizol permeated the whole room. There

was an old box TV, the kind that Sanjay had grown up with. He was pleased with the familiar object in the room. He had never liked flat-screen TVs.

Sanjay changed into hospital clothes.

He did not get into the bed meant for the patient. Instead he sat on the bed meant for the companion. He picked up his phone to call Preeti. After he reassured her that he was fine and did not need her to stay with him, he hung up the phone with the customary 'I love you' phrase.

Dr Ramesh walked in, followed by a couple of his assistants. He asked, "How are you feeling, Sanjay?"

Sanjay said, "I am fine."

"Anything we can do to make your stay better?"

"I am fine."

Dr Ramesh instructed his assistants to check Sanjay's vitals. They also took some blood and asked Sanjay for his urine sample. Sanjay obliged.

Dr Ramesh then asked, "Where is your wife? I thought she would be here with you."

Sanjay said, "No. She is at home. I told her that I am fine. I do not want her to sleep on this uncomfortable bed." Sanjay pointed to the patient's bed.

Dr Ramesh laughed. He asked, "But why would she sleep there?"

Sanjay replied, "Because she knows how uncomfortable I would be on it and she would give up her bed for me." Sanjay pointed to the bed he was sitting on.

Dr Ramesh inquired, "Can we make it better in anyway?"

Sanjay said, "I am fine."

Dr Ramesh asked one of his assistants to stay back and explain the procedure to Sanjay and get his signatures on the consent form, while he finished his rounds.

Usually, Dr Ramesh went home for lunch after his rounds. But that day, he felt like checking on Sanjay. So he came to Sanjay's room. Sanjay was sitting on a chair, flipping channels on TV.

The doctor knocked on the door. Sanjay looked up startled.

The doctor said, "The last time I visited you as a doctor. I have now come to ask you if you would like to have lunch with me. So I thought it would be appropriate to knock."

Sanjay was a little taken aback but he thought it would be good to have some company for lunch. So he agreed. The doctor called the cafeteria and asked for two north Indian *thali* (meals).

Sanjay said, "And I thought that there was some special place that doctors get their food from. Alas! It's the cafeteria I was hoping to escape."

The doctor laughed. While the two men waited for their food, Dr Ramesh asked, "So Sanjay, why don't you tell me about yourself."

Sanjay was a gregarious person. So he began narrating tales from his childhood. Ramesh was a very good listener. Slowly, from childhood anecdotes, Sanjay moved to serious tales from teenage and life in general.

The food arrived. The two men were hungry.

They soon swapped stories about how they met their wives. They talked till a nurse came in and reminded the doctor, "Sir, it is time for your evening rounds."

Dr Ramesh looked at his watch and was amazed at how quickly time had passed. He said goodbye to Sanjay and moved on to his work.

It was then time for the doctor to go home. He was packing up and getting ready to leave. Suddenly, a nurse came rushing into his cabin. "Sir, there is something wrong with the patient in room 220."

The doctor replied, "That is Sanjay's room." He rushed to his bedside. He could see that Sanjay was having some kind of a panic attack. He asked the nurse for medication to calm him down. He decided to stay with Sanjay till he calmed down.

Dr Ramesh called his family and told them that he would be late. When Sanjay calmed down, he broke down. In between sobs, Sanjay said, "I cannot lose my mind. It is the best thing about me. I have always been smart. I have

had such a good memory that most people were jealous. If I do not have my brain, then what is left?"

He continued, "Infact, Preeti says she loves me for my sexy mind."

Dr Ramesh tried to calm him down again. "We do not know anything yet. I understand your plight. My profession too depends a lot on this instrument called the brain. We never realize how important it is until we are faced with the challenge of no longer having it. We must be careful how we use it. It can be used for good and evil. It is such a powerful instrument."

Sanjay nodded in agreement. Finally, Ramesh had to give Sanjay a sedative for him to sleep. Ramesh went home. The next morning, he came to check on Sanjay. He knocked the door and said, "How is my friend today?"

Sanjay seemed better and he said, "I am fine."

Ramesh looked at him. Sanjay looked uncomfortable. Then Sanjay said, "I am afraid that the procedure today will take away my sex appeal."

Ramesh asked, "What do you mean?"

Sanjay replied with a smirk on his face, "I have a sexy brain and I know it."

The doctor laughed and he said, "Would you believe that I have a sexy brain too and I know how to use it wisely so. So trust me. I will do all that I can to help you."

Sanjay asked the doctor if he would like to have breakfast with him before the procedure. Ramesh agreed. The men bonded over breakfast till the nurse came in to get Sanjay ready.

The doctor said, "I have to get ready too so that we can keep the sexiest part of your body intact. I cannot imagine you without your sense of humor and amazing stories."

Sanjay winked at the doctor and the doctor gave him a thumbs-up sign. Both prepared for the procedure as they relied on their wits to get them through the day.

I relate this story to my life thus:

35
Being with Family is More Important than Making Money – DJ

"Wake up, son! Hurry up or your dad is going to be furious," said Lorelai, trying to wake her son up.

"Mom, please! Just fifteen minutes more. Dad is always furious," said Sam, pulling up the sheets on his face.

"Son, you are going to be late for work. Please wake up," shouted Lorelai.

Reluctantly, Sam woke up and slowly moved towards the bathroom. Like every other youngster, Sam wanted to live his life in total freedom, much to the chagrin of his parents. And like every other ambitious father, Sam's father Robert wanted Sam to join the family business. Robert's company was a big well-renowned electronics empire in America. He needed someone to carry forward the family name.

"Good morning, son. How's it going?" asked Robert, flipping the pages of the newspaper.

"Morning dad," replied Sam and plugged in his earphones.

This was a daily routine at the Brandon family. Robert was often away from home on business tours. He tried make his family happy in his own way but there was always a distance, which was widening by the day. Lorelai and Sam were used to life without Robert that nothing mattered anymore.

Sam found solace in music. He started taking music lessons at the age of six. Now, at the age of twenty-four, he was a great music composer. After finishing music school from Berkley University, he wanted to start his own record label and sign up new bands that had potential and creativity. When he asked his father for some money to establish a start-up, all he got was harsh words. His father called his passion an "aimless career."

When Sam decided to take up a part-time job to earn some money to start his record label, Robert Brandon considered it an insult. To stop him from pursuing the job, Robert asked Sam to join his business. Robert felt this would be more respectable and ensure that the money stayed within the family.

But this was not acceptable to Sam. All he wanted to do was start his own record label but his father wouldn't let go of a single chance to drag him into the family business. He felt his father didn't know him at all. Lorelai tried explaining to Robert that Sam was a prodigy of the musical kind and that he was not cut out for business. But for Robert, status and prestige were everything.

"Look son, I'm doing this for your own good. It would do you good to join the family business. You can do wonders. You can make millions and what not,"cried Robert, infrustration. "Why do you not want to join this empire?"

"You know what would have actually been good, dad? Staying home with us when we needed you. Knowing us would have been good. We don't want the money you earn for us. What good does money do when you don't have anyone to share it with?" shouted Sam. "You say you did it for us, but then again we want your company not your money, dad. I am sorry but I won't join your business."

Robert stood shocked. Never once in his life had he heard his son raise his voice. He felt as though he was losing control of his family, especially his son. He had to do something to hold the family together. So he proposed an idea to his son.

"Okay son, I have heard what you think of me. Not very high as far as I know, but I have an idea. A proposition for you. You work for me for just a month. If you don't like it, if it doesn't work out, I will never ask you to do this again. But if it does work out, you will have to join the business," said Robert, with some hope in his eyes. "I'll even set up a studio for you."

Sam narrowed his eyes with suspicion at his father. "What is he trying to do? Is he serious or is he just playing with me?" Sam wondered.

"What do you get out of it?" asked Sam.

"Nothing son, I just want to spend some quality time with you. And for all you know, you may even like the job," said Robert.

"Deal. But just a month, not more than that," said Sam. With this, they shook hands.

On the first day at office. Sam thought he would be given a beautiful cabin with an amazing view of the city, a laptop and other comforts. Little did he know that his father was not the kind to give everything on a plate. Sam had to work his way through.

Sam was assigned a small cubicle outside his dad's cabin. However, he did get a laptop to manage the accounts.

Lost in thoughts and rhythm, Sam picked up two pens and started beating them on the table. This irritated the employee in the next cubicle. He complained to Robert about this.

Sam left all his tasks and went down to the canteen and started playing the guitar, attracting the attention of several employees. The staff went berserk and none of them worked.

On hearing this, Robert was furious. He yelled at Sam in front of all the staff for being irresponsible.

Robert forgot that he was talking to his son and screamed at him for his negligence and lack of dedication.

Sam felt outraged. He picked up his bag and left the office without a word with his father. He went straight to a café.

When Robert's anger cooled down, he realized his mistake and went looking for his son, only to realize that Sam had already left. When he asked a fellow employee about Sam's whereabouts, he was told that he had left for a performance at the Hard Rock Café.

Furious, Robert went to the café with half a mind to drag him down the stage, back to the office. But when he reached the café and heard his son sing and play, he was awestruck. He couldn't move. A tear rolled down his eye as he watched the people in the café clap for his child.

When the show was over, Sam walked down the stage. Robert stood waiting for his boy with open arms. Sam couldn't resist it either and ran straight into his father's arms.

A family reunited. Robert understood that building relationships was tougher than making money.

I relate this story to my life thus:

36
Rise, Go Get your Dreams – DJ

"Don't worry, Andrew. It's a piece of cake. You got this job," said Andrew to himself, admiring himself in the mirror and fixing the loose tie around his collar.

As the clock beeped 8 a.m., Andrew rushed outside and was on his way to office in his car. Today, the law firm Mathers & Sons was going to announce its new partners. Andrew and many others were positive that he had a chance to be on board.

Andrew was a great lawyer. He had never he lost a case in his career of six years. He was a well-deserving candidate for a place on the board.

The meeting began with a heavy discussion on which employee should be chosen as the new partner: Andrew or James. Both were leading lawyers in the state. Andrew had a laid back attitude while James considered everything in a competitive manner. James wanted to be on top always.

James and Andrew were called into the board room. Sitting across the table were the three top faces of Mathers and Sons: Mr Cooper, Ms Hudson and Mr Paxton.

James and Andrew were interviewed separately.

"So Mr James, why do you think we should take you as a partner in the company?" asked Mr Paxton.

James gave a broad smile and replied, "Well sir, I am a graduate of Harvard Law School. I have been in this company for the past eight years and never once have I let this company down. Look at my track record."

"Would you like to add anything, Mr James? This is your chance to make or break," said Mr Paxton, leaning forward on the desk.

"Well no, sir. I think that will do. I am a very dedicated person and I give my hundred percent to anything I do," said James, pleased with himself.

"That will do, Mr James. You may leave now. And please send in Mr Andrew," said Mr Cooper.

After James left the room, Ms Hudson spoke, "Was he really bragging in front of us all? I don't think we need such people on the board. What do you folks think?"

"What I think is we should not judge the guy without meeting the another one. For all we know, he could turn out worse than him," said Mr Cooper.

Ms Hudson and Mr Paxton nodded in approval. They had a serious look on their faces. They had a few minutes ago. Andrew entered the room with a smile and shook hands with the three people sitting across him.

"So Mr Andrew, we have seen your records and your reviews and you seem to be loved by everyone in this office. That's some kind of a charm you have," said Ms Hudson.

Andrew continued to smile.

"Thank you, Ms Hudson. It's an honor to hear that from you. I'm your huge fan. The way you handled the Arthur Fitzgerald case was what inspired me to become a lawyer," said Andrew, with a huge grin on his face that made Ms Hudson blush.

"Well that's very nice Mr Andrew. But tell me why we should consider you a partner in the company?" asked Mr Cooper, interrupting the conversation between Andrew and Ms Hudson.

"Well sir, I have passion in me that drives me to new levels of success. I was the best student at Princeton. And in my career of six years, I haven't lost a single case. I consider this company my family. When my family grows, I grow. My dedication knows no bounds and I feel I can be a tremendous leader. I believe in this principle:every possibility is accompanied with a responsibility and unless the responsibility is accepted, any task is only half-done," said Andrew, with a smile.

The trio was impressed. Ms Hudson was a little more impressed than she should have been. They were all pleased.

Andrew became the new partner in the firm. Everyone was ecstatic. Except James. James couldn't be more pissed off. He thought he deserved the post more and that Andrew was loved more for his easy attitude.

Andrew's stint as the firm's partner got off to a great start. Everyone greeted him with more respect than before. Andrew blushed and was ecstatic. Until the big news came in. One of the biggest companies was scheduled for a meeting with Mathers & Sons. And to Andrew's surprise, it was to be chaired by him.

This was a big deal. Whatever happened in the meeting was Andrew's responsibility. One tiny mistake could cost him his whole career and future. Never in his life had Andrew been so nervous. The burden of representing the whole firm was just too much and Andrew was losing control.

The meeting began. The stakes were high but Andrew kept his cool. He put his best foot forward giving the client an impression that they were the best and it was the client's privilege to have the firm represent them and not vice-versa. He even referred to some of the cases they had lost to give an honest and comprehensive picture to the client. This approach did the trick and the client was made to believe that they were in great hands that wouldn't let them down. Andrew's charm and humility impressed the client and the deal was seized. Andrew was appreciated by the management team of Mather & Sons. He was complimented for his initiatives and presentation style.

Andrew was on cloud nine. He had carried out his responsibility by seizing the opportunity came his way. He believed strongly that with possibilities came responsibilities, which had to be executed with diligence.

I relate this story to my life thus:

37
True Leaders Don't Inspire Through Gossip but with their True Stories – DJ

The classes got over pretty quickly for a Monday. The students of the college rushed out of their classrooms to wards the canteen. One guy ran towards the street with a camera in his hand. No one seemed to notice him rushing towards the street apart from the few whom he bumped into.

It was drizzling outside. While most people looked around for shelter, Brandon was clicking a few pictures. To him, the rain brought out the beauty of the streets. Wet and shining roads, shimmering lights, children getting soaked in the rain and what not! Being a photographer, he had an eye for such things.

He had inherited the passion for photography from his mother, his only idol. She had died when he was just twelve. To him, photography was a way to reminisce his mother. His bedroom was a photo gallery of all the places he had been to. It was a visual map of all the great places that existed in this world but were hidden to the human eye.

"Mr Brandon, a minute please?" said Professor Cooper, inviting Brandon to his office.

"Yes professor?" said Brandon, taking a seat in the professor's office.

"Brandon. How have you been doing?" asked Professor Cooper, trying to initiate a conversation.

"I'm doing great, sir. How about you?" Brandon replied in a formal way.

"Very well Brandon. And how is the photography going? Still using that camera of yours?" asked the professor.

"Oh yes, sir! Every day to be precise. It is something I can never part with," replied Brandon with a smile.

"Exactly the response I was hoping for," said the professor, with excitement. "I have this great event that I need to cover as a professor of journalism. And I would like to accompany me, if you would like to."

"I'm sorry professor. But I do not cover events. I would really like to, but that's not my thing. I am sorry," replied Brandon, in a sad voice.

"Well, what would you say if I told you that the famous travel photographer, Andre Mebarak, is going to be there?" asked Professor Cooper. "And also, he is looking for interns for his next project."

"Andre Mebarak! How? I've been following him all my life. Isn't he in Berlin at the moment?" asked Brandon with curiosity.

"He was son. Let's just say, he owed me a favor and decided to pay me this way. So, are you still not interested?" asked the professor,with a smile.

"You don't have to ask twice, sir. I'll be there. I am sorry to have declined your offer before. I will be there covering the event," said Brandon, in a robotic voice.

Brandon was ecstatic. He had dreamt of becoming like Andre Mebarak ever since he had first read his blog. Traveling the world was his dream. And soon he was going to live it.

The event was held in a glorious historic building, which had been a famous photography spot for a hundred years now. Brandon too had been here a thousand times, chasing his passion.

The guests kept arriving and Brandon kept clicking pictures of eminent personalities and asking them for their reasons to be there.

And then there he was, standing in the corner of the podium where he was supposed to speak in just a few minutes. Brandon saw this as an opportunity and went up to Andre to introduce himself.

"Hello, Mr Mebarak. It's an honor meeting you, sir. I am your huge fan! I've read all your books on photography and I follow your blog too," said Brandon, in a shaky yet excited voice.

Andre shook hands with Brandon who reminded him of himself back in the day. He said, "Always nice to meet a fan. I am glad we still have people passionate about photography. What's your name, buddy?"

"I am so sorry I forgot to introduce myself. I am Brandon Reynolds."

And just then, Andre Mebarak was called on stage to talk to the audience about his career in photography.

Andre began with a short account of how he once got lost as a child. He was a small boy of seven years when he saw the first and the most beautiful sunset of his life. He stood awestruck by the beauty of nature and knew he would never forget this sight. When he was found later, all he could think of was the sunset. It felt as though the rays were reaching out to him, to take him to a land of bliss.

Even as he grew up, he often visited the fields where he once got lost. Armed with a camera, he would sit for hours, waiting for the sunset so that he could take it away with him. This was when his passion for photography began.

However, the times were hard. His father lost his job and his family had to struggle to survive. Andre ended up doing two part-time jobs after school,which gave him no time to continue his passion for photography.

Harsh times forced Andre to pursue a more reliable career that would assure him a secure future and a stable life. He found an accounting job in a company, which lasted only a year when he realized that there was nothing he wanted more than traveling the world and clicking the most extraordinary pictures of all time.

And with just enough money to buy train tickets, Andre began his journey around the globe, capturing the world in a camera. His parents tried to convince him to come back to his accounting job, but all he could hear was the chirping of the birds. Nature lured him to turn his dreams into reality.

The room was filled with applause for the man who stood before them. Some even stood to cheer him. A stupefied Brandon remained seated, wondering how life could be so unfair at many times. Brandon thought of the struggle of the man with so much talent to achieve what he loved.

With this thought, Brandon went back to covering the event when a tap on the shoulder distracted him. It was Andre wanting to talk to Brandon and offer him an internship.

"But why me sir? You barely know me," said Brandon.

"I think I know you a little too well, son. And I say it from experience that you will be perfect for the job. And also I had a little help from your professor," said Andre, chuckling as he shook Brandon's hand and left.

I relate this story to my life thus:

38
A Determined Mind can Cause even a Miracle – DJ

"God knows where this child disappears at night," cried Lorraine pacing down the hall. It was almost midnight and there was no sign of Josh. His cellphone was switched off. His friends were not responsible enough to take care of Josh if he got into trouble.

Two hours later, a worried Lorraine continued pacing the hall when there was a knock at the door. Lorraine rushed to the door and opened it. She saw a drunk Josh leaning against the wall. He didn't seem to be in a condition to understand a word. So Lorraine spared him the lecture and put him to bed. She would talk to him later in the morning.

That night, Lorraine couldn't sleep at all. She was a single mother and she couldn't see her child slip out of her hands. As though she did not have enough on her plate already, she now had to deal with her son's drinking problem too. These were the times when she wished Adam were alive.

"Where are you Adam? I wish you were here," she whispered, staring at the ceiling.

Later in the morning, Josh woke up with a hangover. He went downstairs looking for a cup of coffee. Lorraine sat at the table waiting for the right moment to talk to her son.

"Morning son," said Lorraine.

"Morning mom," replied Josh, giving no thought to how worried she must have been the previous night when he didn't come home until 2 a.m.

"May I ask where you were last night?" asked Lorraine.

"It's none of your business, mom. Stay out of it," replied Josh, looking for something in the fridge.

While this typical teenager's reply means nothing, it still hurts a parent—like a dart piercing the heart.

Lorraine wouldn't take this reply. With an icy voice, she said, "If you are staying in my house on my money, then my rules count. And yes my son, it is

my business to know everything that you do."

"Listen mom. Not now, okay? I'm in a bad mood with a really bad headache. I don't need one of your lectures right now. So take a chill pill, please," replied a frustrated Josh.

Shocked by his response, Lorraine said, "This is not the way to speak to your mother, Josh!"

Josh took his cup of coffee upstairs while Lorraine kept screaming at him for being irresponsible, till she heard the door upstairs slam.

It was as though he had shut her out of his life. Lorraine knew she had to do something before it was too late. She was his mother, after all. She couldn't see him waste a way his life like this. Grounding him was not the solution. She had tried it before and it had encouraged Josh to sneak out of his room.

That evening, the same thing happened. A carefree Josh went out without informing his mother. That night, Lorraine got the news that a group of teenagers had been in a road accident. Josh had been in the front seat of the car and was severely injured.

A worried Lorraine rushed to the hospital in tears. She had no control of herself. She cried a lot, thinking she had failed as a mother.

The doctor informed her that Josh was out of danger but they were still running a few tests.

As Lorraine entered the room in which Josh was admitted, their eyes met. Both pairs of eyes were moist and red. As she walked towards her son, the tears started pouring out.

"I am sorry, mom. I am really sorry. I have been a bad son. Please forgive me," cried out Josh.

"No son. Don't cry. Everything is going to be all right. Just have faith," said Lorraine, smoothening her son's hair and giving him a hug.

After a few more tests, Josh was allowed to go home. But the bad news was he could not walk anymore. He had lost control over his legs and could not walk without support.

To Josh, this was a big setback. The thought of never being able to walk again was unimaginable to him. This made him frustrated. He was filled with anger inside.

He would just sit in his room and order around. Nothing interested him. His interaction with the outside world came to a nought.

Lorraine was worried. She could see her son slipping into a world of depression. She tried taking him out for a walk in the park several times. But after a few days, Josh stopped going out. All he did was sit in his balcony and stare.

Lorraine had had enough. She could not see Josh waste his life like this. So the next day, she barged into his room at six in the morning, woke him up and took him outside. She helped him dress up. Out in the ground, he was reluctant to even try walking. He had given up. So she picked him up, carried him on her back and tried hard to make him walk.

She continued doing this forcefully for another week. Then Josh gave in and started to try on his own. The mother-son duo did this everyday for two months. Finally, the day came when the big miracle happened. Lorraine did not have to go upstairs to assist her son down for dinner.

That day, a determined Josh walked down the stairs all alone for the first time, with a smile on his face. Taking the support of the walls and the railing, he made his way downstairs.

Lorraine felt on top of the world. Finally, her life was turning out the way she had wanted it to be. Her son was going down the right path. She had succeeded, as a mother and as a person.

I relate this story to my life thus:

39
It Takes a Leader to Create Leaders- DJ

"Your assignments have been graded and they are kept on the table. Please take them with you on your way out," said Professor Albert.

The students rushed out of the classroom. Some of them wanted to just get out and some of them were eager to see their grade.

Professor Albert called out, "Dean, please see me after class."

Dean dragged his bag after him and reached the table to see a C-grade on his assignment. A shocked Dean went up to the professor. He shot his question, "Is this for real? This cannot be true. I learnt this lesson a hundred times and I know it by heart."

"Dean, this is why I called you. You are undoubtedly the best student in the class but this not what I expect of you. You see, you have that spark in you and I expect more from you," said Professor Albert.

"With due respect sir, this is one of my best work. It is way better than what others have written and I believe it deserves an A at least," said Dean.

"You really think so Dean? If that's what you want, I will give you the grade, but that doesn't make your essay worthier than it is now."

"No thank you, professor. If you don't mind, I'll take leave."

Dean left the professor's class. Professor Albert chuckled and got back to his desk.

"Hey wait up," said Sam, running from behind. "What did the professor have to say to you?"

"Don't ask, buddy. Apparently I am not good enough for his class," said Dean, in a frustrated tone.

"What? You've got to be joking. I thought he admired you. I was kind a jealous of the way he treated you."

"Apparently not, Sam. Just because he has written some international bestsellers, it doesn't mean he can judge anybody else's talent," muttered Dean.

"Actually, he can. Don't worry Dean. I'm sure you're gonna do great in the next assignment. This was just an essay," said Sam and went on to talk to a few girls.

That night, Dean read his essay on the Shakespearian era over and over again. He couldn't accept the fact that he had got a C-on an essay he thought was impeccable. But as he read his essay again, it seemed as though it could have been written by anyone who had done enough research. *It dawned upon him that he had behaved badly with a man who tried to guide him on the right path.*

So the next day, Dean woke up early in the morning, went for his walk and then straight to the professor's office.

"I was expecting you, Dean. Come, have a seat," welcomed Professor Albert, with a smile.

"Why were you expecting me? That too after how horribly I behaved with you yesterday," said Dean.

"You see Dean, after twenty-one years of experience, I can now read each of my student's mind. So Dean, tell me, what can I help you with?" asked Professor Albert.

"Well, I came by to apologize to you for my behavior yesterday. I felt bad that I argued with you. And you were right. When I read my essay, it didn't seem good enough to get an A. So sorry, professor," said Dean.

The professor chuckled under his breath and said, "No Dean. Sorry is not what I want from you. I have seen your potential and your talent. You write so well that it almost brings me to tears. I want you to spread the talent inside you on this sheet of paper. You think you can do that?"

"I will try professor. I think I lose my creativity midway. One minute I get this amazing idea in my mind but the next minute I don't know how to process it. That kills my creativity and I don't know how to break free from it." exhaled Dean.

The professor stared at Dean with a smile on his face. "What? What's wrong?" asked Dean.

"Nothing Dean, it's just that you remind me of someone who is talented yet does not believe in himself. But you know what he did? He overcame this fear

of not succeeding. He wrote a novel on his own failures and achievements, which actually became an international bestseller and helped him throughout his life. Do you know who that person is?" asked the professor.

"Hmmm. No sir, doesn't ring a bell," said Dean.

"It's the person sitting right in front of you," said Professor Albert. "I wasn't always successful. I was mediocre in school and college. However, I had a passion for reading and writing. I loved books and would gorge on all reading material that I could lay my hands on. I see the same spark in you. You have the guts to admit that you are wrong and that is the first step in the ladder to success: recognizing your failures and learning from them. Believe in yourself and your abilities."

Dean was in deep thought. Greatly inspired by a person who had always been his idol, he felt a new surge of energy and a desire to achieve something in life. He knew he had to work towards his goals without losing a precious second. His professor handed him a leaflet. It was an invitation to a seminar on English literature in which scholars from all the world over were participating.

Dean was elated.

I relate this story to my life thus:

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"When I Die, Burn Me in Moga (Punjab)" – DJ

It was the chilly month of November in 1990. Thirteen-year-old Deepak was playing on the street at 4.30 p.m. with his friends. Suddenly he saw two big fat Sardar policemen knocking on his door. His mother opened the door and had a conversation with them.

Deepak saw his mother' face sweating. She seemed nervous. She called Deepak and said, "Deepu, go to the bus stand and see if your father's scooter is still there. He is late from office and has not reached home yet."

Deepak was quite excited to go on his new cycle. He immediately called his friend, "Vicky, let's go on a ride on my bicycle." He was not thinking of anything else. He felt happy to ride the bicycle for a distance of two to three miles. Vicky and Deepak reached the bus station after forty minutes. They saw Deepak's father's blue scooter standing with the number PBM-1201.

On the way back home, they stopped at a snacks shop. Deepak took out two rupees from his pocket. Deepak and Vicky had samosas with chutney. When Deepak reached home, he saw his neighbors standing outside his house.

Parking his bicycle, Deepak rushed home and saw his mother sitting on the floor and crying out aloud. There were a few women consoling her and requesting her not to cry. Before he could ask what had happened, his aunt hugged him from behind and said, "Deepu, terrorists have killed your father."

Deepak was shocked. Everything became dark in front of his eyes and he could not realize or feel anything. He ran instantaneously into the corner room in his house. It was dark and cold. He hid behind a chair in the corner and started crying.

He started asking himself, "Why did this happen? It cannot be true. Just this morning, when I said goodbye to *papa,* he promised me to get me a cricket bat in the evening. He cannot go like this."

The thirteen-year old boy decided at that moment, "If my father is not with me and he cannot fulfill his promises, anyone can leave me anytime. So I cannot trust anyone now in my life."

Deepak became a lonely and introverted child. In school, his friends made fun of him. Some boys thought he had an attitude problem. For the next twenty years, he was viewed as a reserved person by his friends and colleagues.

One day Deepak decided to prove himself to the world so that he was not made fun of or bullied by others. He got admission in an engineering college. Unfortunately, every semester he had supplements to clear and was always absent in class. He didn't understand what was happening with him.

One day, on his friend's advice, he attended a training session in New Delhi. There he saw himself as a thirteen-year-old boy living the same life in the body of a thirty-three-year old person. He recalled his father's unfulfilled promise to get him a cricket bat. The incident had happened twenty years ago but it still affected him.

During the training, Deepak stood up in the class of 200 people and asked the trainer, "Sir, how can I not be affected by this incident? I really want to come out of it. Is there any solution to it?"

The trainer answered with a smile, "Yes, Deepak. You just need closure with your father."

Deepak asked, "Closure? What does it mean?"

The trainer answered him, "When your father died, it was unexpected. You couldn't digest the truth and that gap is not yet filled. There are many conversations that you wanted to have with your father but you couldn't have them. So I suggest you write a letter to him and do it now."

Deepak could not sleep that night. He took a pen and paper and started writing to his father.

"*Papa*, where are you? I miss you a lot. I love you a lot. I am still waiting for that cricket bat. I know you are watching me all the time and I am never alone. I am sure you are taking care of yourself, wherever you are…"

His tears wouldn't stop as he wrote the letter. He felt very light that night as though tons of weight had been lifted from his body.

I relate this story to my life thus:

Epilogue

This is not the end of positive affirmations and thoughts. It is just the beginning of the journey to empower your lives.

I have always been inspired by the books of Robert Kiyosaki (a businessmen) and Jim Rohn (a great motivational speaker). Isn't it great that you can read an author's mind even after 200 years just by reading his book?

I hope the stories in my book inspire you and impact your lives in a positive way in the days to come as it has always been my desire to leave my footprint on the sands of time, before I leave the world. Even if one person comes to me and says, "Deepak, because of your book, I have started making positive changes in my life," I would believe that I have succeeded in achieving the purpose of my life.

I believe writing this book is my way of serving others. This book has given me a sense of completeness and I hope you gained something from reading it.

I always hated writing during my childhood but now it is just the opposite. I would say writing is my biggest stress buster. I recommend that all of you write about your fears, thoughts and plan of action as this will give you more clarity in life.